

THE
FORBIDDEN
PROPHECIES

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Introduction

From the Oracles of Delphi in ancient Greece to Doomsday 2012, humanity has always been fascinated by prophecies. End time prophecies in particular seem to strike a chord with us and are more popular than ever. Perhaps this is due to the last century having witnessed so much destruction and devastation. Talk of global warming saturates the news, the threat of a nuclear holocaust has persisted since the invention of the atomic bomb and storylines involving asteroids, aliens, and zombie apocalypses wiping out all planetary life dominate Hollywood blockbusters. These are uncertain times, and new world events bring fresh speculation and a renewed eagerness to make sense of what's happening around us by looking to the predictions of prophets and oracles of history.

Is it just the fear of the unknown that drives us? There seems to be more to it than that. Today millions of people indulge in practices such as astrology, tarot, numerology, palm reading, psychics and many others. The reasons are just as rich and varied as the methods; they include curiosity, guidance for everyday life and searching for meaning. It is not solely the domain of the religious, as even atheists, those who claim there is no God, are drawn to trying to peer into the future, with horoscopes being

more popular than ever in secular societies. Indeed, the desire to unveil the future is an aspect of human behaviour that transcends culture and religion and is as old as the human story itself.

As with most things in life, where there is great demand there is supply. History is littered with individuals and sacred texts that make the momentous claim of being able to see into the future. In this book we are going to examine the prophetic credentials of those in whom millions of people have put their trust. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, and we will utilise a number of different tools in order to put the most popular of these to the test.

CHAPTER 1

Genuine Prophets or Frauds?

Imagine you hear a knock on the door. You open it and are greeted by a stranger:

“I can see into the future. Devote yourself to my teachings and follow me!”

How would you react? Perhaps you would challenge them by asking for proof. Perhaps you would think the person is crazy, slowly backing away and shutting the door, locking it for good measure as well. Most people in their everyday lives, when confronted with outrageous claims, are understandably sceptical. Isn't it amazing then, that today, millions of people blindly follow individuals and books that make the momentous claim of being able to see into the future, without ever scrutinising them?

This desire to peer into the future can manifest itself in a variety of different forms, many of which will be examined in this book. Examples include the famous individuals from history who claimed to be able to

predict the future. Such individuals go by different titles including prophet, soothsayer and oracle. Ancient sacred texts which contain predictions will also be covered. Another manifestation is practices such as astrology, tarot cards, and palm reading. Superstitious beliefs such as the concept of lucky and unlucky numbers are also related. Although the rituals and methods differ, all these different systems of prophecy have one thing in common: they are used by the masses to try and see into, and even influence, the future.

How can we tell whether a system of prophecy genuinely provides insight into the future? Unlike the practitioners themselves who often rely on mysterious methods to derive their predictions, there are some very practical tools we can use to separate truth from falsehood. One is the accuracy of the predictions - do they get it right all the time? If a person, book, or practice really can provide insight into the future, then they should be able to do so without making mistakes. If they make mistakes, it shows it was merely guesswork rather than a genuine supernatural ability. Another is that their predictions must be numerous, as anyone can make a lucky guess. Another aspect is the nature of their predictions; are they clear and specific or ambiguous and general. Such predictions lend themselves to multiple interpretations and therefore don't have much value in terms of their predictive capability. Even if the prophecies are accurate, numerous, and unambiguous, they must still not be easily predictable, i.e. obvious to anyone who can analyse social and political circumstance and estimate outcomes. In other words, the predictions should not be the result of a perceptive mind. For example, someone might make the prediction that a young child will have a terrible accident. This is hardly remarkable, because children injure themselves all the time. From that point of view, it would be more remarkable if they could predict which child won't ever injure themselves! Finally, the personal lives of the prophets are important. If they were known liars, for example, then this would cast doubt on their credibility as it would bring into question their motivations. Using these different tools, we are now going to analyse the predictive capabilities of the most popular individuals and methods in history.

Ancient Maya

The ancient Maya civilisation, known for advanced writing, mathematics, and astronomy, flourished for centuries in Mesoamerica, especially between 300 and 900 CE. It reached the peak of its influence around the sixth century CE. Along with impressive stone monuments and elaborate cities, the lost Mesoamerican civilisation left behind traces of its sophisticated calendar, known as the Long Count calendar, which scholars have spent decades struggling to decipher. Calendars such as the Gregorian calendar typically start at year zero and then linearly increase over time. However, the Maya calendar is different as it acts like a cycle. It tracks roughly 5,125 years and then resets at year zero.

In the decades leading up to the year 2012, popular culture latched on to theories that the end of the Long Count calendar's cycle—which coincided with the date December 21st, 2012—represented the end of the world in the Maya belief system. The prediction that the world would end in 2012 is the most widely-disseminated doomsday tale in human history, thanks to the internet, Hollywood, and an ever-eager news media. According to a Reuters global poll, in the lead up to December 21st, 2012, one in ten people felt some anxiety about that date [1]. Russia's Minister of Emergency Situations issued a public reassurance that the world would not come to an end. French authorities barred access to a mountain in the village of Bugarach, where some believed a UFO would rescue them. The United States saw a surge in the sale of underground bunkers and ammunition as survivalists prepared themselves for the worst.

December 21st, 2012 came and went without incident. The mass belief that the Maya prophesied the end of the world was all based on a complete misunderstanding of their calendar. Those who believed in doomsday 2012 failed to take into account the intricacies of Maya timekeeping. For the Maya, December 21st, 2012 was simply the day that their calendar went to the next cycle and reset at the year zero. According to the Maya, when one great cycle ends, another begins. In fact, the Maya predicted

the world would most certainly not end in 2012. Archaeologist William Saturno discovered a series of numbers painted on the walls at a Maya complex in Guatemala. The calculations included dates that go far into the future: “The ancient Maya predicted the world would continue, that 7,000 years from now, things would be exactly like this. We keep looking for endings. The Maya were looking for a guarantee that nothing would change. It’s an entirely different mindset” [2].

With the 2012 doomsday that never was, we have an example of a prophecy being attributed to a people who never actually made it in the first place. In spite of this, people continue to be fascinated by the culture and beliefs of the Maya, and still look to their writings in order to try and gain insight into the future. It is unlikely that the Maya had the ability to prophesy because they failed to foresee the Spanish conquest of their own lands. The early sixteenth century saw the Spanish Conquistadors arrive on their shores and destroy the Maya civilisation. The Spanish colonisation entailed forced conversion to Christianity and those Maya who refused to abandon their native religious practices were punished with arrest and torture. The artefacts of the Maya were actively destroyed and all but a few of their sacred texts burnt. It’s difficult to believe that the Maya had the power to see into the future and could prophesy about other cultures and peoples, when they failed to foresee the end of their own civilisation during their lifetimes.

Chinese Daoism and I Ching

Daoism, also known as Taoism, is a group of ancient Chinese religious and philosophical traditions. Every Daoist movement believed in the imminent end of the world – or at least the end of the greater part of humanity that had not accepted the Daoist way [3]. Much like Abrahamic religions such as Christianity and Islam, its sacred texts are rich in prophecy. The Divine Incantations Scripture is the oldest known Chinese classic text that details an apocalypse for the unbelievers, with parts of it

being dated to the beginning of the fifth century [4]. The book laments the evil state of humanity:

Now, epidemic demons are killing people. The world abounds in vice and lacks goodness. The people do not recognise the truth. The Three Caverns revelations have been spreading for a long time, but the people are benighted and fail to seek out and accept them. They bring suffering on themselves. [5]

The book gives glad tidings to those who believe in and propagate Daoism. They are said to be under divine protection and will have worldly success bestowed on them “from now on”, indicating that these things would take effect immediately:

From now on, the Three Caverns revelations will be disseminated far and wide. The Realized Ones [i.e., adepts] will accept it and the unenlightened [who need it] still more. Henceforth, ghost troops will help those who accept the Three Caverns revelations. Every action will reach completion and all that is done will be harmonious. The great demon kings will protect them. [6]

The book goes into frightening detail about the consequences for those who do not convert to Daoism, oppose its teachings, and plunge society into chaos. Such people will be punished with illnesses and annihilation:

There are nine hundred eighty thousand kinds of water illness. There are thirty-two black illnesses, white illnesses, red illnesses, virid illnesses, and yellow illnesses that cannot be cured. There are ninety-six varieties of sudden death. All these happen to criminals and to the worldly who do not follow the law of Dao and who plunge the country into disorder. This is because when bad people are unwilling all their lives to consider what is good, Heaven sends divine guardians with ten thousand illnesses to annihilate them. [7]

Let's now analyse the accuracy of these prophecies in light of the history of China. The Daoist religion flourished during the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 CE) when it gained official status and was supported by the government [8]. During the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE) it was actively supported by several emperors and its scriptures were collected and even published [9]. The religion started to suffer major setbacks during the Yuan Dynasty (1279 – 1367 CE) when many copies of its scriptures were ordered to be burned. The Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912 CE) saw the religion being widely rejected in favour of other philosophies such as Confucianism. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Daoism had fallen much from favour [10]. Things got considerably worse during the Nationalist Period (1912 – 1949 CE) which saw the embrace of modernity and Western culture, including other religions such as Christianity. The government confiscated some temples for public buildings [11]. The advent of the People's Republic of China (1949 –present) brought with it the greatest persecution of the Daoist religion, as the Communist Party of China, officially atheistic, suppressed Daoism along with other religions. Many Daoist temples were damaged and its priests were sent to labour camps [12]. Despite all of this persecution over the last century, none of the prophetic promises or threats found in The Divine Incantations Scripture ever transpired. Contrary to Daoist teachings, there was no supernatural protection of Daoist priests or temples, and their persecutors did not suffer illnesses or death. In fact, the exact opposite has occurred, as the once popular Daoist religion has declined significantly compared to other religions in the region and the atheistic Chinese communist party has gone from strength to strength, with China now being a military and economic superpower of the world.

Another important book in Daoism is the I Ching, an ancient Chinese text meaning “The Book of Changes”. It dates back more than 3000 years and is thought to be one of the world's oldest fortune-telling manuals [13]. The Sinologist Michael Nylan describes the I Ching as the best-known Chinese book in the world [14]. Throughout history, the I Ching has been consulted in matters ranging from politics and business to personal relationships and warfare. For example, it played a role in their overthrow of the Shang dynasty by Zhou King Wu in 1070 BCE [15]. It is divided into sixty-four

chapters, with each of these chapters headed by a six-lined symbol, referred to in English as a 'hexagram'. Each of the hexagrams is associated with a number of prophecies. In order to derive a reading, one has to think of a question they require guidance on and then toss a number of coins. The result of the coin toss derives a random pattern of broken and unbroken lines, which act as an index to look up one of the sixty-four hexagrams in the I Ching. The theory is that the hexagrams represent the basic circumstances of change in the cosmos, and by consulting the book a person will be provided with guidance for the present and the future.

Here are some examples of readings that can be randomly derived:

A shoal of fishes. Favour comes through the court ladies. Everything acts to further. [16]

The wild goose gradually draws near the tree. Perhaps it will find a flat branch. No blame. [17]

Darkening of the light injures him in the left thigh. He gives aid with the strength of a horse. [18]

The companion bites his way through the wrappings. If one goes to him, how could it be a mistake? [19]

The I Ching is filled with such obscure and cryptic readings, so one problem is that it allows for multiple interpretations. It seems that one could do just as well, if not better, by randomly flipping through a book of English proverbs and contemplating the advice found in such sayings as: "Where there's a will, there's a way," "Don't bite off more than you can chew," or that most ambiguous of proverbs, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," whose interpretation depends upon whether the metaphor "gathering moss" is taken to be a good or a bad thing. Now that's not to say that there is no benefit in such proverbs, as they do contain wisdom. However, it's one thing to reflect on and derive lessons from them, and quite another to try and use them to predict the future.

Even if the reading is clear and unambiguous, there is the issue of conflicting answers. Based on the random results of the coin tosses, you can end up with an overload of mutually contradictory information. On the one hand, a reading can result in a line that urges you to proceed with a course of action as it will bring good luck and success, and on the other the same reading can also give you another line which tells you to avoid proceeding as it will only bring bad luck and disaster. How can one resolve such a contradictory reading? The I Ching does not contain any instructions on how to reconcile contradictions, and when one consults I Ching experts one will find that there are numerous different approaches to resolving this problem, many of which are arbitrary. Some suggest that the lines in the hexagram should be read as a sequence or story in a particular order e.g. bottom to top. Others take the opinion that they represent alternative choices. Some even interpret the lines to be representations of different people within the situation. You can see that there are very different rules that you can use to resolve contradiction, and depending on which ruleset you prefer, you can get very different outcomes. The same reading can be manipulated to be positive or negative, depending on which approach you choose to adopt. Again, note that there are numerous different rules on how one can do this, none of which have a basis in the original I Ching. Unfortunately, one cannot rely on consulting the I Ching for an answer to this problem, because one could also get a conflicting answer on how to resolve the problem of contradiction!

We will end this section by considering the German theologian Richard Wilhelm's translation of the I Ching which is regarded as one of the finest, and has had a profound cultural impact in the West. The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung was so impressed by the I Ching that he wrote the foreword to Richard Wilhelm's translation. Jung consulted the I Ching and asked the book what it thought of its introduction to the Western mind. Jung found himself moved by the significance of the reading he received. It stated, in part, "A cauldron with legs upturned. Further removal of stagnating stuff." Jung interpreted this to mean that the I Ching resembles an unused cauldron, and when the stagnating stuff is removed it "may be utilised for a higher purpose" [20]. This seemed to confirm to Jung that the I Ching

approved of its introduction to Westerners. One writer critical of Jung's interpretation pointed out how a sceptic might interpret this reading from the I Ching. He suggested: "The I Ching should be overthrown, and our minds cleansed of antique superstition" [21].

Hinduism and Astrology

Astrology is the study of celestial objects such as planets and stars in order to try and gain insight into human affairs and worldly events. There are many different types of astrology. Western astrology, also known as Sun Sign astrology, is a simplified system of astrology which considers only the position of the Sun at your birth. It is said to provide insight into general character traits that you might have in common with others who share the same star sign. Natal astrology is much more complex, it takes into consideration your birth date, birth time, and location in order to construct a birth chart. It claims to provide a much deeper analysis of character traits, strengths, and weaknesses. Synastry, also known as the astrology of relationships, compares birth charts to see how compatible you are with others, and is commonly used to determine whether a relationship is going to be successful or not. Many people use these different types of astrology for entertainment or amusement, and most will have been introduced to astrology from a young age, in the form of horoscopes in newspapers. Research conducted amongst a group of students in England found 100% knew their star sign, 70% read their horoscopes, and 85% agree that the description of their birth sign describes their personality [22].

Hinduism is an ancient religion originating in India; it is one of the most widely followed religions, with over one billion people identifying as Hindus today. Astrology plays a huge part in Hinduism, perhaps more so than in any other mainstream religion. The traditional Hindu system of astrology is known as 'Jyotish'. The term is derived from Sanskrit and means "the science of heavenly bodies". Jyotish studies the movements of astronomical bodies and is used to keep time, maintain calendars, and even predict auspicious times for Hindu rituals [23]. The Vedas, which

are a large body of Hindu sacred texts, are filled with astronomical and astrological references. Jyotish is considered to be one of the six 'limbs' of the Vedas, which one must study in order to gain mastery. Of the six limbs, Jyotish is linked to the eyes of the human body. In other words, it is considered to be the "eyes of the Vedas" quite literally and is thus linked to 'seeing' spiritual truth [24].

The foundation of Hindu astrology is the notion of 'bandhu', which means "relation" and is the concept that the outer worlds and inner worlds are connected. The idea is that by measuring the outer world, one can grasp an understanding of the inner world. In Hinduism, our universe is believed to be the living body of God and all beings exist within this universal body. There is a famous hymn in the Vedas which describes the relationship between our universe and God:

A thousand heads hath Puruṣa, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet.
Covering the world all around, he yet exceeds it on all sides. This
Puruṣa is all that yet hath been and all that is to be; The lord of im-
mortality as well as of creatures who grow by food... When they
divided Puruṣa how many portions did they make? What do they
call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet... The
Moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the Sun had
birth... Forth from his navel came mid-air the sky was fashioned
from his head, Earth from his feet, and from his ear the regions.
Thus they formed the worlds. [25]

We can see that the Vedas attributes divinity to the universe. The Sun is said to correspond to the eye of God, the Moon to His mind, space is His navel and the Earth His feet. There are many texts in the Vedas which show the astrological importance of the planets and stars. Here for example, we have a hymn that calls on the Sun to remove disease of the heart and also conquer one's enemies:

Looking upon the loftier light above the darkness we have come. O
Sun, God among the Gods, the light that is most excellent. Rising

this day, O rich in friends, ascending to the loftier heaven, O Sun remove my heart's disease, take from me this my yellow hue... With all his conquering vigour this Sun hath gone up on high, Giving my foe into mine hand: let me not be my foeman's prey. [26]

Here the Moon is associated with longevity:

He, born afresh, is new and new for ever ensign of days he goes before the Mornings. Coming, he orders for the Gods their portion. The Moon prolongs the days of our existence. [27]

Depending on the position of the Moon at the time when a baby is born, it is believed that it can predict whether the baby will survive past infancy or die soon after birth. A strong Moon is believed to confer a long life and a weak Moon causes death in infancy [28].

Other Hindu texts also contain astrological references. The Mahabharata is an epic poem of ancient India that was written after the Vedas. It contains a mixture of history, morality, philosophy, and devotional material. The Mahabharata is of religious and philosophical importance and describes the ancestral ceremonies that can be performed and the benefits of them:

He that is desirous of children should perform the Sraddha [ceremony] under the constellation Rohini, while he that is desirous of energy should do it under the constellation Mrigasiras. By performing the Sraddha under the constellation Ardra, a man becomes the doer of fierce deeds. A mortal, by performing the Sraddha under Punarvasu, makes such again by agriculture. The man that is desirous of growth and advancement should perform the Sraddha under Pushya. By doing it under the constellation Aslesha one begets heroic children... [29]

The chapter goes on to list numerous other benefits that can be gained from performing the ceremony under different constellations.

Hindu sages took such theological concepts that are found in the Vedas and other texts - the divinity of the planets and stars, and the benefits that they can bestow on mankind - and developed a highly sophisticated system of astrology. The sage Maharishi Bhrigu is believed to be one of the seven great sages of Hinduism [30]. He is credited as the father of Hindu astrology and was the first compiler of predictive astrology [31]. He is also believed to be the author of Bhrigu Samhita, an astrological classic.

Jyotish continues to influence the lives of millions of people today. Newborn babies are traditionally named based on their Jyotish charts, and Jyotish concepts are pervasive in many areas of life such as decision making about marriage, opening a new business, moving into a new home, etc. The Indian astronomer Balachandra Rao remarks: “The belief in astrology among our masses is so deep that for every trivial decision in their personal lives—like whether to apply for a job or not—they readily rush to the astrologers with their horoscopes.” [32]. A day that is considered auspicious can thus lead to a large number of weddings taking place, putting severe pressure on facilities like wedding halls and caterers. A famous example is the engagement of Palden Thondup Namgyal who was the Crown Prince of Sikkim. It was publicly announced in 1961 but the wedding was put off for more than a year as astrologers in India warned that 1962 was an inauspicious year for marriages. The wedding was planned according to the advice of many astrologers but it still ended in disaster as the Crown Prince ended up separating from his wife in 1978 and officially divorced in 1980 [33]. In a separate incident, the same Crown Prince became the new King of Sikkim in 1965 after his father died. His coronation was done on an astrologically favourable date that was believed to bring him good luck as a ruler. Just ten years later in 1975, his people voted in a referendum to determine if they want to abolish their 300 year old monarchy and merge with India. Whereas the King opposed the referendum and his country’s annexation by India, his subjects voted in favour of Indian statehood. Sikkim became a state of India and he was removed as its absolute ruler [34].

Can astrology really be used to predict the future? From a scientific perspective, some celestial bodies do indeed exert unseen forces on our planet. The best and most obvious example is the influence of the gravity of the Sun and Moon on the tides. It is one thing to explain the effect of other planets on earth by means of physics and other sciences of astronomy, but it's an entirely different matter to claim that planets like the Sun and Moon can be used to predict human affairs such as life expectancy and death as well as events such as elections and war.

In fact, Indian government authorities have gone so far as to treat Hindu astrology as a scientific discipline. India's main government funding agency, the University Grants Commission (UGC), provides support for university courses in astrology. A statement issued by the UGC inviting universities to submit proposals for starting such departments and courses reads: "there is urgent need to rejuvenate the science of Vedic Astrology in India, to allow this scientific knowledge to reach the society at large and provide opportunities to get this important science even exported to the world" [35]. This provoked outrage among India's academics, especially those in the science faculties. In 2011, an organisation opposed to astrology attempted to ban its promotion by appealing to existing false advertising legislation. Its appeal was dismissed by the Mumbai High Court, which argued that the existing legislation "does not cover astrology and related sciences. Astrology is a trusted science that has been practiced for over 4000 years..." [36].

In order to be considered a valid scientific discipline, like astronomy for example, astrology must fulfil the basic requirement of a scientific theory—it must stand up to rigorous testing. Scientific testing of astrology has been conducted, and no evidence has been found to support any of the purported effects outlined in astrological traditions [37]. In one such case, Jayant Narlikar, India's most eminent astrophysicist, conducted a statistical test on astrological claims. He designed a test to verify the claim of Indian astrology that intelligence can be determined from a person's horoscope. The test involved collecting two hundred birth details of one hundred highly intelligent school children (group A) and one hundred

intellectually disabled children (group B). The destinies of these cases could hardly be more different, so they were ideal for testing the above claim. These details were used to cast horoscopes for these children. After recording these details the horoscopes were mixed and randomised and Indian astrologers were invited to participate in a test of their predictive ability. Twenty-seven astrologers, with an average experience of fourteen years participated in the test. Each participant was sent a random set of forty horoscopes and asked to identify to which group of children each chart corresponded. If the astrologers really had divine insight into the intelligence of a person based on their horoscope, they would score 100 per cent, or at least close to it. The average astrologer actually had a success rate of 43 per cent. In order to appreciate just how poor this is, imagine that a random group of non-astrologers were asked to guess blindly. They would have an average success rate of 50 per cent since there are only two outcomes, the child is intelligent or the child is intellectually disabled. This is still a better result than the astrologers who averaged 43 per cent, a result which is worse than pure guesswork. Certainly no scientific theory would survive such a poor success rate [38]. These results contradict the claims of Indian astrologers and the poor results are consistent with the many tests of Western astrologers where several hundred controlled tests have found no support for its claims either [39]. If astrology cannot even make accurate predictions for matters in the present, then it stands to reason that it most certainly cannot accurately predict the future.

There are some key differences between Hindu astrology and Western astrology. The latter emphasises the psychological nature of the individual, and when it comes to the events in our lives, it teaches that the planets and stars are not a good bet for predicting events. Hindu astrology also defines a person's psychological nature, but it places a bigger focus on understanding the events that will take place in our lives, based on the influence of the planets and stars. So every Hindu astrologer worthy of the name must be able to make predictions about the future.

With this difference in mind, we'll now analyse the claims of Western and Hindu astrology from a rational and logical perspective. Let's use India as

an example since it has a large population. Up to 1.5 million births are registered in India per month [40]. In Western astrology, a person's zodiac sign is based on the position of the Sun on the day they are born. Each month of a calendar year is assigned a different sign of the zodiac. For example, a person born between March 21st and April 19th would have the zodiac sign of Aries, April 20th and May 20th would make a person a Taurus, and so on and so forth. Each zodiac sign brings with it specific personality traits. The implication is that the 1.5 million people born each month in India will have exactly the same zodiac sign and thus identical personality traits. But we know this is not the case, because even identical twins can have very different personalities, despite the fact that they have the same genes, shared the same womb, and usually experience the same childhoods.

Hindu astrology is a lot more complex as it takes into account not only the position of the Sun, but also that of the Moon and other planetary bodies, the date of a person's birth, and even their time of birth. Based on this information, a Hindu astrologer will come up with a detailed birth chart for a person. Unlike Western astrologers, Hindu astrologers claim that our birth chart determines not only our personality, but also our lives. If Hindu astrology is true then the implications are astounding, we would expect for there to be a phenomenon among every pair of twins who are born seconds apart because they will have exactly the same astrological birth chart. Not only would we expect them to possess similar personalities, but also that they will lead lives that are very similar. Clinical studies have shown that this is not the case; identical twins, even those born seconds apart, go on to have polar opposite personalities and very different fates. Professor Tim Spector, head of twin research at King's College, London, has been carrying out a pioneering study for more than 20 years. He has led research involving thousands of pairs of identical twins in England and has concluded that even identical twins can lead very different lives. His research has found that in some ways, twins are very alike, for example in their looks. But in other ways, they are dissimilar. For example, identical twins often have very different lifespans and different occurrences of genetically-linked diseases. Professor Tim Spector states: "We see it in so many different ways. For example, our research has shown that twins

rarely die of the same disease. Yet they share many other features, such as height. It is not a straightforward business... Most of the twins recruited to our study went to the same school and lived together, eating the same food for the first 18 or so years of their lives... But the outcomes of their lives are often very different indeed" [41].

This brings us to another oddity in Hindu astrology, the use of amulets and idols to try and change one's fortunes. An amulet is a small object worn to ward off evil, harm, illness, or to bring good fortune. Hindu astrologers don't just provide the service of calculating birth charts; they also recommend the use of objects such as amulets and idols. Don't you think it's strange that on the one hand, Hindu astrology teaches that planets and stars control our destinies, but on the other it promotes the use of man-made objects like amulets to counteract their influence? If a mere trinket such as an amulet worn around the neck can overcome the power of vast planets like Mars, Jupiter, and Venus, and vast stars like the Sun, then perhaps these heavenly bodies don't wield too much influence in our lives to begin with! Even the use of amulets and idols in and of themselves is baseless, if we really think about it. People will carry lucky charms and devote themselves to idols to seek protection. For example, it's not uncommon for Hindus to place an idol of the elephant god Ganesh in their shops and businesses. Ganesh is widely revered as the remover of obstacles, so it's believed that using the idol will ward off bad luck. Now, imagine if one of those shops or businesses was to suffer a fire and burn to the ground. The idol, along with everything else, would be totally destroyed. Even Hindu temples and shrines in India, which are filled to the brim with idols, have suffered catastrophic destruction. If these idols lack the power to prevent their own destruction, then they surely do not have the power to protect us.

Nostradamus

Michel de Nostredame (December 14, 1503 – July 2, 1566), usually Latinised as Nostradamus, was a French physician and reputed seer who published collections of prophecies that have since become widely famous.

In 1555, he published the first edition of his most famous work, titled, *The Prophecies* (or, *The Centuries*). It included 10 groups (centuries) of 100 prophetic quatrains (four-line poems) each, covering many nations and spanning from the sixteenth century to the year 3797.

Nostradamus is arguably the most popular soothsayer in history. Since 1775, at least one book on Nostradamus has been published every 20 years, and since 1840, at least one every decade [42]. Nearly 450 years have passed since Nostradamus first published his *Centuries*, yet the number of translations and commentaries found in bookstores bears testimony to the perpetual interest in his prophecies. Millions of people all over the world believe in his predictions and keep looking for proof that they are real and will all come true.

Is his massive popularity justified? Could Nostradamus really see into the future? We can arrive at an answer by analysing the nature and accuracy of his prophecies. Here are some examples of such prophecies:

To support the great troubled Cappe; the reds will march in order
to clarify it; a family will be almost overcome by death, the red, red
ones will knock down the red one. [43]

The great swarm of bees will arise, Such that one will not know
whence they have come; By night the ambush, the sentinel under the
vines. City delivered by five babblers not naked. [44]

As you can see, one major issue with his predictions is that they can be so vague that they are often described as verbal jigsaw puzzles. His prophecies contain French and Latin terms, historical allusions, anagrams, puns, odd spellings, partial words, inverted word order, and so on. Now, if Nostradamus were a true prophet, would he have needed to cloud his predictions with such vague and ambiguous language? The predictions of false prophets are often vague in nature for a good reason. This characteristic makes it easy for their followers to claim a fulfilment of prophecy when the inevitable happens - eventually something, somewhere, will occur

which bears enough of a similarity to the prophecy that it will seem like the prophecy was an accurate prediction.

In fact, what we find is that when Nostradamus does provide detail, such as specific dates, places and events, many of his prophecies are demonstrably false. In the following prophecy he predicted that disease, famine, and war would devastate the human race by the year 1732:

From the time I am writing this [1555 CE], before 177 years, 3 months and 11 days, by pestilence, long famine, and wars, and more still by inundations, the world between this day and that, before and after, shall be diminished, and its population so reduced that there will hardly be hands enough to attend to agriculture, and the lands will be left as long without culture as they have been under tillage. [45]

Even though he gave himself a window of 177 years for this prophecy to come true, it still failed to materialise. Moreover, thanks to the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century there were major advances in agriculture which resulted in the human population exhibiting unprecedented sustained growth; the exact opposite of what Nostradamus predicted!

In another prophecy, he predicted that the world would experience great terror from the sky in the month of July 1999:

In the year 1999, in the seventh month, from the sky will come the great King of Terror, bringing back to life the great King of the Mongols. Before and after, Mars to reign by good fortune. [46]

As July 1999 approached, his followers applied the name “King of Terror” to, among other things, the Antichrist, nuclear war, a giant meteor, and a foreboding solar eclipse. Yet none of these terrors came from the sky in July 1999.

Did Nostradamus believe that he could see into the future? It seems that he presents contradictory answers. On the one hand Nostradamus explicitly claimed that he could not be mistaken:

I cannot fail, err or be deceived, though I am the greatest sinner in this world, subject to all human afflictions. [47]

And thousands of other events will come to pass, because of floods and continual rains, as I have set forth more fully in writing my other prophecies, which are drawn out in length, in prose, setting forth the places and times so that men coming after may see them, knowing the events to have occurred infallibly. [48]

Contrary to these claims, however, Nostradamus acknowledged the possibility of error:

I have calculated and composed all during choice hours of well-disposed days, and as accurately as I could... [49]

Should I, however, have made any errors in my calculation of dates, or prove unable to please everybody, I beg that your more than Imperial Majesty will forgive me. [50]

We can see that his personal accounts present a mixed picture. Regardless of whether he claimed prophethood for himself, an analysis of his often vague and, indeed, mistaken predictions have shown that he did not have a special insight into the future. The Italian scholar Francesco Guiciardini, a contemporary of Nostradamus, mocked those who had willingly accepted Nostradamus' prophetic ability despite evidence to the contrary. He declared, "How happy are the astrologers! Who are believed if they tell one truth to a hundred lies, while other people lose all credit if they tell one lie to a hundred truths" [51].

Mother Shipton

Old Mother Shipton is considered by many to be England's greatest female prophet. She has been so popular over the centuries that some have dubbed her the English Nostradamus. Mother Shipton's identity is

not definitively known, as unfortunately many of her biographical details have proven to be inventions. A biography of 1641 alleges that she was born in Yorkshire in 1488 and died in her seventies. Later biographies allege that she was the Devil's child and a witch [52].

What is certain is that her name became linked with many tragic events and strange goings on recorded all over England throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. One example, the Pall Mall Gazette of April 14th, 1879, reported that people were in a panic because they believed Mother Shipton prophesied that on Good Friday, 1879, Ham Hill would be swallowed up at 12 o'clock by an earthquake, and the town of Yeovil would be visited by a tremendous flood. Some people actually left these localities with their families to avoid the calamities; others made various preparations for them. On the Good Friday, large numbers of people flocked to the vicinity of Ham Hill, to see it swallowed up, but were left disappointed [53].

The fascination with her has continued into the 21st century. Large numbers of tourists continue to visit Mother Shipton's Cave in Knaresborough and it is one of England's oldest tourist attractions. There is even a species of moth named after her because of the pattern of a hag's face on both wings.

There are no written references to Mother Shipton, or her predictions, during her own lifetime. Her earliest recorded prophesy is a pamphlet dated 1641, eighty years after she was said to have died. The following is a verbatim reprint of it: "The Prophetie of Mother Shipton, In the Raigne of King Henry the Eighth. Fortelling the death of Cardinall Wolsey, the Lord Percy and others, as also what should happen in insuing times" [54]. According to the 1641 publication, Mother Shipton correctly predicted that Cardinal Wolsey would see the town of York from the distance but never actually set foot in it. Historical records tell us that in 1530 Cardinal Wolsey did indeed make a journey to York. As he approached the town he climbed to the top of a tower and saw it in the distance. Before he was able to enter the town he received a message from King Henry

VIII asking him to immediately return to London. He died on the way back to London, thus fulfilling Mother Shipton's prophecy. The problem with this prediction is that the earliest record of it is dated 1641, over a century after the man had died. So, it could very well be a backdated prophecy (i.e. one which described an event that had already occurred).

One of the most famous prophecies attributed to Mother Shipton seems to foretell the coming of technology such as fast communications and steamboats:

Carriages without horses shall goe,
And accidents fill the world with woe.
Around the world thoughts shall fly
In the twinkling of an eye....
Under water men shall walk,
Shall ride, shall sleep and talk;
In the air men shall be seen,
In white, in black and in green....
Iron in the water shall float,
As easy as a wooden boat.

This prophecy first appeared in print in an 1862 edition of her sayings. Charles Hindley, the editor of that edition, later admitted that he had composed them himself [55]. The technologies to which the prophecy alludes, such as the telegraph ("Around the world thoughts shall fly In the twinkling of an eye") and the steamboat ("Iron in the water shall float, As easy as a wooden boat") had already been invented before 1862. If "In the air men shall be seen" is a reference to flight, then this was very close to the time that the Wright brothers had invented the first successful airplane in 1903, and over half a century after Sir George Cayley had flown the first successful glider in 1804.

Other works about Mother Shipton subsequently appeared, and with each work new prophecies were credited to her. This is the case with many of her predictions, which are mostly hoaxes. They were written

by others and attributed to her after the events had happened in order to profit from her legend. Mother Shipton is an example of an individual who many have believed to be a female prophet but who may not have even existed as a real person outside of English legend.

Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith (December 23, 1805 – June 27, 1844) was an American religious leader and founder of Mormonism and the Latter Day Saint movement. By the time of his death, he had attracted tens of thousands of followers and founded a religion that continues to the present day, with around 14 million Mormons around the world. Joseph Smith bore many titles in his lifetime; Elder, Seer, President, Mayor, even Lieutenant General, but he is probably best known as the Prophet. And prophesy he did, often with great passion, invoking the powers of heaven and the name of God. Among Mormons, he is regarded as a prophet on par with Moses, such is his high status.

Let's analyse the most accurate of Joseph Smith's predictions. In this prophecy, he predicted that Northern and Southern states of America would go to war:

Verily, thus saith the Lord concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass, beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls; And the time will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning at this place. For behold, the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States, and the Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations; and then war shall be poured out upon all nations. [56]

Mormons believe that the American Civil War of 1861 - 1865, which was fought between the North and South and took place nearly 30 years after

Joseph Smith made the prediction, fulfilled this prophecy. The Civil War prophecy became one of the most widely published revelations by Mormons. Not surprisingly, it received greatest attention during the Civil War, as many viewed the conflict as a vindication of the prophetic powers of Joseph Smith.

Is this a genuine prophecy? It does seem to be accurate from a historical standpoint: the American Civil War was preceded by the rebellion of South Carolina and it was indeed a conflict between the Northern and the Southern states. While the prediction is accurate, it did not require any special insight into the future. When one looks to the social and political landscape of the United States at the time that Joseph Smith made this prediction, it becomes clear that it could easily be the result of a perceptive mind, based on existing disputes and tensions which were prevalent.

The American Civil War historian James McPherson offers a summary of conditions prior to the Civil War that contributed to it and exacerbated tensions. During Joseph Smith's lifetime, there were a number of expected dividing lines as the country grew in the period from 1800 - 1850, such as that of rich versus poor, Catholic versus Protestant, and rural versus urban. The greatest danger was the issue of slavery, because slavery was associated with competing ideals that just happened to also have geographic associations. So serious was the division that McPherson writes that the slavery issue "would probably have caused an eventual showdown between North and South in any circumstances" [57].

Congressman John Randolph made exactly such a prediction in the House of Representatives in 1807, over 20 years before Joseph Smith: "If ever the time of disunion between these States should arrive, the line of severance will not be between Eastern and Western, but between slave-holding and non-slave-holding States" [58].

American statesman John Calhoun stated in 1847, more than a decade before the breakout of war: "The day that the balance between the two sections of the country - the slaveholding States and the non-slaveholding

States - is destroyed is a day that will not be far removed from political revolution, anarchy, civil war, and widespread disaster” [59].

We can see that a conflict between the North and South was a very real prospect around the time that Joseph Smith made his prediction. But what about the detail that Joseph Smith provided in his prophecy, such as the rebellion of the state of South Carolina? He seems to have predicted exactly which state would rebel. What are the chances of that? In fact, the selection of South Carolina as the catalyst of the war did not require any special insight. For example in November 1832, just prior to Joseph Smith having made his prediction [60], South Carolina had advocated the doctrine of “nullification” arguing that it could nullify federal laws or taxes that they ruled to be unconstitutional. In other words, they openly declared their support for rebelling against any federal regulation that went against their interests [61]. So the rebellion of South Carolina was a real threat at the time that Joseph Smith made his prediction; the history of the state made it the logical and intuitive choice to include in his prophecy.

Joseph Smith made numerous false prophecies. For example, in 1843 he prophesied that the United States Government would be overthrown within a few years:

I prophecy in the name of the Lord God of Israel, unless the United States redress the wrongs committed upon the Saints in the state of Missouri and punish the crimes committed by her officers that in a few years the government will be utterly overthrown and wasted, and there will not be so much as a potsherd left for their wickedness in permitting the murder of men, women and children, and the wholesale plunder and extermination of thousands of her citizens to go unpunished. [62]

To give some background to this prophecy, Joseph Smith along with thousands of Mormons had settled in the state of Missouri in 1838. Political and religious differences between old Missourians and newly-

arriving Mormon settlers provoked tensions between the two groups. Seventeen Mormons were killed, while others surrendered to state troops and agreed to forfeit their property and leave Missouri [63]. As a result of such persecution, Joseph Smith prophesied that unless the United States government rectified the injustices then it would suffer divine retribution and come to an end within a timeframe of a few years. In the years that followed, the United States government did not rectify any of the wrongs committed against the Mormons in Missouri. In fact, a United States Governor went on to have Joseph Smith arrested and tried for treason [64]. In 1844, Joseph Smith was murdered by an armed mob in jail while he was awaiting trial. In spite of all this, the United States government still stands, over 170 years later.

In another failed prophecy, Joseph Smith predicted that the wicked people of his generation, those who he saw as ungodly, would soon be wiped out by disease, famine, and natural disaster unless they repented and turned back to God:

And now I am prepared to say by the authority of Jesus Christ, that not many years shall pass away before the United States shall present such a scene of bloodshed as has not a parallel in the history of our nation; pestilence, hail, famine, and earthquake will sweep the wicked of this generation from off the face of the land, to open and prepare the way for the return of the lost tribes of Israel from the north country... Repent ye, repent ye, and embrace the everlasting covenant and flee to Zion, before the overflowing scourge overtake you, for there are those now living upon the earth whose eyes shall not be closed in death until they see all these things, which I have spoken, fulfilled. [65]

No such mass repentance ever took place, as even at the time of his death his followers were not even 1% of the population of the United States, and yet a widespread destruction of the wicked of his generation never occurred; biblical disasters such as disease, famine, and earthquakes never transpired.

The final example of a failed prophecy is Joseph Smith's prediction that the second coming of Jesus would take place within 56 years:

President Smith then stated that the meeting had been called, because God had commanded it; and it was made known to him by vision and by the Holy Spirit... it was the will of God that they should be ordained to the ministry and go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time, for the coming of the Lord, which was nigh - even fifty six years should wind up the scene. [66]

This prophecy was spoken by Joseph Smith in 1835 and is recorded in official Mormon sources. It's been over 180 years and the return of Jesus to earth, which will herald the End Times, still has not taken place.

Bahá'u'lláh and Abdul-Bahá

The Bahá'í religion was established in Iran in 1863. It is the youngest of the world religions, and today there are over 5 million adherents, known as Bahá'ís, all over the world. The founder of the Bahá'í religion, a man by the name of Bahá'u'lláh, claimed to be divinely inspired:

I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. [67]

He proceeded to send letters of warning to the rulers and leaders of the world. In these letters, Bahá'u'lláh openly proclaimed his station as a Messenger of God. Followers of Bahá'u'lláh cite these letters as evidence of his prophetic ability, they claim that they contain clear predictions which came true. One such letter addressed the people of Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Bahá'u'lláh wrote that the sultans, the leaders of Constantinople, had been a source of tyranny and told them that their rule would soon come to an end:

O people of Constantinople! Lo, from your midst We hear the baleful hooting of the owl. Hath the drunkenness of passion laid hold upon you, or is it that ye are sunk in heedlessness? O Spot that art situate on the shores of the two seas! The throne of tyranny hath, verily, been established upon thee, and the flame of hatred hath been kindled within thy bosom... We behold in thee the foolish ruling over the wise, and darkness vaunting itself against the light. Thou art indeed filled with manifest pride. Hath thine outward splendour made thee vainglorious? By Him Who is the Lord of mankind! It shall soon perish, and thy daughters and thy widows and all the kindreds that dwell within thee shall lament. Thus informeth thee the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. [68]

This warning can be found in the book *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, which was completed in 1873 and is the central religious text of the Bahá'í faith. The collapse of the Ottoman empire in 1918 brought an end to the rule of the sultans. On March 3rd, 1924, the sultans lost their powers and they were replaced by parliamentary rule in the newly formed Turkish Republic. Is this really a remarkable prophecy? When Bahá'u'lláh penned the warning, the once mighty Ottoman empire was already in terminal decline. In fact, rival nations were referring to it as “the sick man of Europe” as early as 1853, over twenty years before Bahá'u'lláh made his prediction [69]. In the prophecy itself, Bahá'u'lláh even highlighted the fact that the rule of the sultans had become “filled with manifest pride” and was a “throne of tyranny”. He also mentioned that “the flames of hatred” had been kindled in the people of Constantinople. If you think about it, the most likely fate of any leadership in such circumstances is that it comes to an end. When those who are ruled are dissatisfied with their rulers, then there is always the chance of an uprising or revolution. This has been the pattern through history; examples include the fall of the French monarchy during the French Revolution and the rebellion of American colonies against British rule during the American Revolution. Another issue is that there are no details of how it would come to an end. Bahá'u'lláh just stated in very general terms that “it shall soon perish”. In fact, the end of sultan rule took place nearly half a century later in 1924, long after he made the prediction.

In another letter, he wrote to the French emperor Napoleon III in 1869. He was warned that he would soon lose his empire unless he embraced Bahá'u'lláh as a Messenger of God:

For what thou hast done, thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought. Then wilt thou know how thou hast plainly erred. Commotions shall seize all the people in that land, unless thou arisest to help this Cause, and followest Him Who is the Spirit of God in this, the Straight Path. Hath thy pomp made thee proud? By My Life! It shall not endure; nay, it shall soon pass away... [70]

In July 1870, within a year of writing this letter, Napoleon III lost a battle against Prussia and was captured. This was followed by his exile to England and a bloody revolution in Paris known as the Paris Commune in May 1871. Did this prediction require a special insight into the future? If one analyses the political events that occurred in the decade leading up to Napoleon's downfall, then a France-Prussia conflict and civil strife in France were inevitable. Napoleon III was a warmonger who actively sought to expand French influence in Europe and around the world. He had fought wars against Russia in the Crimea and in Italy against the Austria-Hungarian empire. Napoleon III was also acquiring colonies throughout Asia and Africa. In the 1860s, Prussia emerged as a new rival to French power in Europe. In 1862, Prussia's chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, famously declared: "The great questions of the day will not be settled by resolutions and majority votes — that was the mistake of the men of 1848 and 1849 — but by blood and iron" [71]. Prussia was the most powerful German state and under Bismarck's leadership it sought to unify Germany. Bismarck engineered wars with Denmark and Austria-Hungary, which resulted in Prussia coming to dominate the Northern German States. The historian David Wetzel wrote: "it seemed that it was only a matter of time before they brought all the German states under the control of Berlin" [72].

Prussia's ambition and victories made it a direct threat to France who did not want a strong and unified Germany on its borders [73]. Napoleon

III recognised the threat that a unified Germany would pose to France, and he looked for allies to challenge Prussia. But this was without success, as Britain, Russia, Austria, and Italy all refused to form an alliance with France. Napoleon III was isolated and would be helpless in the event of a conflict with Prussia. In 1866, Prussia, with a population of 22 million, had been able to mobilise an army of 700,000 men, while France, with a population of 26 million, had an army of only 385,000 men, of whom 100,000 were in Algeria, Mexico, and Rome. [74]. The Prussian army, combined with the armies of other German states, would be a formidable enemy. Napoleon III ordered a rapid expansion of his armed forces and this greatly added to tensions with Prussia. We can see that years before Bahá'u'lláh made his prediction, France was on a collision course for war, with a very real prospect of defeat at the hands of its enemy. Finally, his prediction that “commotions shall seize all the people in that land”, which implies that there would be civil unrest in France, is by no means remarkable as civil unrest goes hand in hand with political instability. When dictators like Napoleon III are deposed, it results in a vacuum and it's not uncommon for power struggles to take place. These are often violent affairs, this is especially the case throughout France's turbulent history.

In summary, we have seen that even the most accurate predictions of Bahá'u'lláh did not require any supernatural ability, just an astute awareness of world history and politics. Bahá'u'lláh died in 1892. His eldest son, Abdul-Bahá, was appointed by his father to be his successor and head of the Bahá'í Faith, a position he served until 1921. Abdul-Bahá's writings and talks are also regarded as a source of Bahá'í sacred literature [75]. Like his father before him, Abdul-Bahá made predictions about political events that he claimed would occur in the near future, some of which turned out to be accurate. However, a true test of one's prophetic ability is not to analyse political trends in the present and then estimate outcomes. Rather, a true test is to make accurate predictions for events in multiple fields, not just politics, and also for events that will occur far into the future. Let's look at examples of such predictions that have been made by Abdul-Bahá. He decreed that his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, would lead

the religion after his death, and he predicted that Shoghi would father a line of descendants who would also lead the religion:

O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi... as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the firstborn of his lineal descendants. [76]

Shoghi Effendi did go on to lead the religion in 1921, just as Abdul-Bahá decreed. However, the situation changed dramatically in 1957, when Shoghi suddenly died at the age of sixty. Shoghi died childless, and so he had no descendants who could lead the religion [77]. This was a situation which went directly against Abdul-Bahá's prediction that Shoghi would be "the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the firstborn of his lineal descendants". Shoghi died without having appointed his successor, and as a result the Bahá'í religion underwent a significant restructure. No longer would the faithful be led by a single individual, instead a governing council made up of nine elected members, the Universal House of Justice, assumed full authority over the affairs of the Bahá'í religion.

In another prophecy, when Abdul-Bahá was questioned about what would happen by the year 1957, he stated that there would be a worldwide transformation of humanity:

Universal Peace will be firmly established, a Universal language promoted. Misunderstandings will pass away. The Baha'i Cause will be promulgated in all parts and the oneness of mankind established. It will be most glorious! [78]

These predictions by Abdul-Bahá were first published in 1923. He foretold that by the year 1957, the Bahá'í religion would spread everywhere

and that there would be worldwide peace and unity among mankind. In actual fact, the decades leading up to the year 1957 and the decades since then have been among the most bloody in history. Social ills like poverty, racism, and crime still plague mankind and are only getting worse, nearly a century after Abdul-Bahá's prediction.

We can conclude that the leaders of the Bahá'í religion, its founder Bahá'u'lláh and his son Abdul-Bahá, did not have any special insight into the future. While they may have been skilled in analysing political trends, when they ventured into fields other than politics and attempted to make predictions that were far into the future, they made false prophecies and therefore were not genuine prophets.

Charles Taze Russell

Charles Taze Russell (February 16, 1852 – October 31, 1916) was an American Christian minister from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Dissatisfied with the doctrines that were being taught by the churches of his day, he began publishing his own views on Christianity. In 1881 he founded an organisation known as the Watch Tower Tract Society. Today this organisation is the main legal entity used by the Jehovah's Witnesses to distribute their religious doctrines. The Jehovah's Witnesses are a sect within Christianity, founded on the principles of Charles Taze Russell's teachings. It is estimated that there are around 8 million Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Watchtower magazine is the most widely circulated in the world, with an average circulation of approximately 62 million copies every two months in 307 languages.

Throughout its history, the Watchtower Society has claimed to be the only organisation on earth that speaks on behalf of God and the only means by which God directs His true followers, the Jehovah's Witnesses. Here are just some examples of the claims the Watchtower Society has made about itself:

The Watchtower is not the instrument of any man or set of men, nor is it published according to the whims of men. No man's opinion is expressed in The Watchtower... [79]

The Lord gives interpretation to his prophecies and causes the same to be published... As certain as the Lord has caused these truths to be published in The Watchtower. [80]

Consider, too, the fact that Jehovah's organization alone, in all the earth, is directed by God's holy spirit or active force. (Zech. 4:6) Only this organization functions for Jehovah's purpose and to his praise. To it alone God's Sacred Word, the Bible, is not a sealed book... [81]

On this basis, the Watchtower Society today exerts tremendous control over just about every aspect of the lives of millions of Jehovah's Witnesses around the world. Loyalty to Charles Taze Russell and the Watchtower Society's teachings has long been equated with loyalty to God. Denying such teachings is, in effect, to deny God. This amazing claim is plainly stated in the Watchtower publication:

The evidence is overwhelming concerning the Lord's second presence, the time of the harvest, and that the office of "that servant" has been filled by Brother Russell... Then to repudiate him and his work is equivalent to a repudiation of the Lord. [82]

Let's now put these claims to the test to see if he stands up to scrutiny. Charles Taze Russell published the first edition of the Watchtower magazine in July 1879 under the title "Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence". According to its first issue, the magazine's purpose was to draw attention to Charles Taze Russell's belief that the people of his time were "living in the last days":

This is the first number of the first "volume" of "ZION'S WATCH TOWER," and it may not be amiss to state the objective of its publication. That we are living "in the last days" – "the day of the Lord"

– “the end” of the Gospel age, and consequently, in the dawn of a “new” age”. [83]

We can see that from its very inception, the purpose behind Charles Taze Russell’s organisation was apocalyptic in nature. In other words, its goal was to bring attention to the impending end of the world as he saw it. It wasn’t long before he was providing specific dates for the end of the world:

In view of this strong Bible evidence concerning the Times of the Gentiles, we consider it an established truth that the final end of the kingdoms of this world, and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God, will be accomplished at the end of A.D. 1914. [84]

Charles Taze Russell wrote the above in 1889, stating that it was an “established truth” that the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth would be accomplished by the end of the year 1914. This was by no means a one-off proclamation; he repeated similar claims throughout his publications in the years that followed. A few years later, in 1892, he went so far as to provide the exact month in which the world would end, October 1914:

The date of the close of that “battle” is definitely marked in Scripture as October, 1914. It is already in progress, its beginning dating from October, 1874. Thus far it has been chiefly a battle of words and a time of organizing forces – capital labor, armies and secret societies. Never was there such a general time of banding together as at present. [85]

Exactly what did Charles Taze Russell teach would take place by the time October 1914 came? In 1889 he set out a number of events as follows. Note how he bases these points not on speculation but rather “Bible evidence”, i.e. all the predictions made are Scriptural:

In this chapter we present the Bible evidence proving that the full end of the times of the Gentiles, i.e. the full end of their lease of dominion, will be reached in A.D. 1914; and that that date will be

the farthest limit of the rule of imperfect men... That at that date the Kingdom of God, for which our Lord taught us to pray, saying “thy Kingdom come,” will obtain full, universal control, and that it will then be “set up,” or firmly established, in the earth, on the ruins of present institutions. Secondly, it will prove that he whose right it is thus to take the dominion will then be present as earth’s new Ruler... because the overthrow of these Gentile governments is directly caused by his dashing them to pieces as a potter’s vessel (Psa. 2:9; Rev. 2:27), and establishing in their stead his own righteous government. [86]

As can be noted in the material above, it is clearly stated in no uncertain terms that among other things the following would take place:

- The year 1914 “will be the farthest limit of the rule of imperfect men”.
- The world’s governmental institutions would be destroyed, “dashed to pieces as a potter’s vessel”.
- God would be the “earth’s new Ruler”; that God’s kingdom will “obtain full, universal control”, and that it will be “firmly established in the earth on the ruins of present institutions”.

The year 1914 came and went without any of the predicted events occurring – the world’s governments and religions were still standing, as indeed they still are today, over a hundred years later. Charles Taze Russell died in 1916. He left behind a legacy of end time prophecies, not one of which had brought the results foretold.

So, just who was to blame for all this confusion and disappointment? By reading the Watchtower Society’s recent publications, one might gather that Charles Taze Russell, the Watchtower president, did not speak specifically about just what 1914 would bring. They imply that any strong expectations or dogmatic claims were the responsibility of others, the

readers. An example of this shifting of blame is found in what was for many years the official history of the organisation:

There is no doubt that many throughout this period were overzealous in their statements as to what could be expected. Some read into the Watch Tower statements that were never intended, and while it was necessary for Russell to call attention to the certainty that a great change was due at the end of the Gentile times, he still encouraged his readers to keep an open mind, especially as regards the time element. [87]

We can see that rather than taking responsibility and admitting that Watchtower teachings on a core doctrine were completely wrong, the blame instead is pinned on those who have no choice but to blindly follow such teachings.

With the realisation that 1914 was a false prophecy, the Watchtower publications initiated a cover-up. Recall that prior to 1914, Charles Taze Russell repeated the claim that world governments would come to an end. Here is a snippet from the 1889 edition of his book “The Time Is At Hand” that we looked at earlier:

Firstly, that at that date the Kingdom of God, for which our Lord taught us to pray, saying, “Thy Kingdom come,” will obtain full, universal control, and that it will then be “set up,” or firmly established, in the earth, on the ruins of present institutions.

Contrast its use of language, that God’s kingdom “will obtain full, universal control”, with a post-1914 edition of the same book which states that God’s kingdom “will begin to assume control”:

Firstly, that at that date the Kingdom of God, for which our Lord taught us to pray, saying, “Thy Kingdom come,” will begin to assume control, and that it will then shortly be “set up,” or firmly established, in the earth, on the ruins of present institutions.

We can see that post-1914 editions of this book try to cover up the false prophecy by changing the wording. Few Jehovah's Witnesses today have any idea of the magnitude of the claims made about the year 1914. Those expectations now receive only the briefest of mentions in the organisation's publications; some are totally passed over.

Even as late as 1994, adjustments were still being made in order to cover up the embarrassment of 1914. Evidence of this can be seen on the cover of the "Awake!" magazine. Up until October 22nd, 1995, it read:

Awake is for the enlightenment of the entire family. It shows how to cope with today's problems. It reports the news, tells about people in many lands, examines religion and science. But it does more. It probes beneath the surface and points to the real meaning behind current events, yet it always stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away.

The statement that "this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world before the generation that saw the events of 1914 passes away", appeared year after year from 1982 until October 22nd, 1995. With the November 8th, 1995 issue, the statement was altered to remove the mention of 1914. It is now open-ended, as it reads "this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things":

Awake is for the enlightenment of the entire family. It shows how to cope with today's problems. It reports the news, tells about people in many lands, examines religion and science. But it does more. It probes beneath the surface and points to the real meaning behind current events, yet it always stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator's promise of a peaceful and secure new

world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.

In summary, we've seen that Charles Taze Russell's publications presented their 1914 end of the world prediction as the product of God's guidance. The calculations were declared to be "God's dates, not ours" [88], an "established truth" [89] and "definitely marked in Scripture" [90]. At the time of their publication, readers would have been left in no doubt that the prediction was divinely backed and not just mere opinion or speculation. It's been more than a century since his original prediction was made and the end of the world has yet to occur, so this stands as a clear failed prophecy.

Aleister Crowley

Aleister Crowley (12 October, 1875 – 1 December, 1947) was an English occultist, ceremonial magician and poet. He is one of the most notorious individuals of the 20th century, being dubbed "The Wickedest Man in the World" by the British media because of his libertine views on sex and drugs as well as his blasphemous writings against traditional religions such as Christianity. By the time of his death in 1947, he was the world's leading occultist. A prolific writer, he published numerous works on the theory and practice of magic over the course of his life. He is most famous for the text known as *The Book of the Law*. Although it was Crowley's own hand that penned the work, he never claimed to be its author. Crowley claimed that during his travels to Egypt in 1904, a supernatural entity that called itself Aiwass made contact with him. Aiwass, described by Crowley to be a being of intelligence far beyond that of human beings, proceeded to dictate *The Book of the Law* directly to him over the course of three days.

After this experience, Crowley identified himself as a prophet and claimed that he had been entrusted by the gods to guide humanity into a new spiritual age. He went on to found the religion of Thelema, which he based on the principles of *The Book of the Law*. Today, followers of Aleister

Crowley and his religion Thelema call themselves Thelemites. Crowley considered the content of *The Book of the Law* to be evidence of its supernatural origin:

He [Aiwass] showed his KNOWLEDGE chiefly by the use of cipher or cryptogram in certain passages to set forth recondite facts, including some events which had yet to take place, such that no human being could possibly be aware of them; thus, the proof of his claim exists in the manuscript itself. [91]

Here we can see that according to Crowley, one of the proofs for the supernatural origin of the book is its accurate predictions of future events. What follows is the most famous example of a prophecy that is associated with *The Book of the Law*:

I am the warrior Lord of the Forties: the Eighties cower before me, & are abased. I will bring you to victory & joy: I will be at your arms in battle & ye shall delight to slay. Success is your proof; courage is your armour; go on, go on, in my strength; & ye shall turn not back for any! [92]

Followers of Crowley put this forward as evidence of the book's higher authorship as they say it's an accurate prophecy about World War II in the 1940s. Let's analyse this claim to see if it really is a validation of the book's prophetic power. One issue is that like with many of the verses of *The Book of the Law*, the meaning is ambiguous. In his own commentary on this verse, Crowley did not treat the mention of "Forties" and "Eighties" as dates:

Forty is Mem, Water, the Hanged Man; and Eighty is Pe, Mars, the blasted Tower. These Trumps refer respectively to the "Destruction of the World by Water" and "by Fire"... Its general purport is that He is master of both types of Force. [93]

Here the "Hanged Man" and "blasted Tower" are references to tarot cards which he used to try and understand the mention of "Forties" and

“Eighties”. Using this method, we can see that Crowley came up with the meaning of “Destruction of the World by Water and by Fire”. It’s true that this could be a reference to war, but it could also be a reference to natural disasters such as floods. Ultimately, it’s not entirely clear.

Crowley’s use of tarot cards to interpret meaning demonstrates a big problem with the book. Just how should it be interpreted, literally, figuratively, or by other means? Depending on which method one chooses to employ, one may arrive at very different meanings. Despite Crowley’s best efforts to understand this verse, he said that there are still certain parts which he was unsure how to interpret. In fact, in Crowley’s own commentary on this verse, he was uncertain as to its overall meaning: “I am inclined to opine that there is a simpler and deeper sense in the text than I have so far disclosed” [94]. So here we have an example of his followers reading prophecies into the text which the prophet himself did not identify. Now, for the sake of argument, even if we grant that this is a prediction about war, it’s in no way remarkable. The early twentieth century, when *The Book of the Law* was written, was the age of empires. Nations were expanding their territories and fighting one another for dominance all the time. In fact, there have been wars going on constantly throughout much of the twentieth century, such as World War I from 1914 - 1919, World War II from 1939 - 1945, and the Cold War from 1947 to 1989. So almost any decade could fit this prophecy! From this perspective, it would have been far more remarkable to prophesy a decade of peace, since fighting and conflict has been the norm.

Another example of a prophecy that is associated with *The Book of the Law* is the following:

Sacrifice cattle, little and big: after a child. But not now. Ye shall see that hour, o blessed Beast, and thou the Scarlet Concubine of his desire! Ye shall be sad thereof. [95]

Crowley identified these verses as a prophecy that was fulfilled by the tragic death of his firstborn child in 1906, two years after *The Book of the*

Law was written. Did it really foretell the death of his child? One problem with identifying these verses as a prophecy is that Crowley himself failed to make this connection. He only declared it to be a prophecy after his child died. Crowley wrote in his commentary on these verses:

This, ill-understood at the time, is now too terribly clear. The 15th verse, apparently an impossible sequel, has justified itself. This, read in connexion with verse 43, was then fulfilled May 1, 1906... The tragedy was also part of mine initiation, as described in *The Temple of Solomon the King*. It is yet so bitter that I care not to write of it. [96]

One reason for his failure to identify it as a prophecy might be its ambiguity. Looking at the structure and the style of language used, the meaning is not entirely clear. The statement “Sacrifice cattle, little and big: after a child” could mean different things. For example:

1. It could be a command to sacrifice a child after having sacrificed animals.
2. It could be informing him that a child will be born after he completes animal sacrifices.
3. It could be a command to sacrifice animals after a child is born.

Another ambiguous part of this prophecy is the statement “Ye shall be sad thereof”. It’s clearly saying that Crowley will be sad, but what is not clear is the reason as to why he will be sad. This statement is made after the mention of animal sacrifices, a child, and the Scarlet Concubine; so any of these three things, or even all of them, could be the source of his sadness, it does not necessarily apply to just the child. Now, if this book really was inspired by a supernatural being that could see into the future, and if this prophecy really was intended to inform Crowley about the death of his child, then it could easily have been worded more clearly such as follows: “Perform animal sacrifices. A child will be born and then die and this will be a source of sadness for you”. As the prophecy stands, it

seems like it has been kept intentionally ambiguous so as to be applicable to as many events as possible in the future.

Another example of a popular prophecy is the following:

But your holy place shall be untouched throughout the centuries:
though with fire and sword it be burnt down & shattered, yet an
invisible house there standeth, and shall stand until the fall of the
Great Equinox... [97]

Crowley identified the “holy place” as Boleskine House [98], a manor on the south-east side of Loch Ness in the Scottish Highlands. Crowley purchased this property in 1899 because he believed its architecture and secluded location were ideal for the performance of magic rituals. Crowley later sold the house in 1913, and since then it has had numerous owners. On the night of the 22nd December 2015, Boleskine House was badly damaged in a fire in mysterious circumstances, thus fulfilling the prophecy according to his followers.

Upon reflection, this is an unremarkable prediction for a number of reasons. Firstly, it could be self-fulfilling, as it’s possible that a follower of Crowley intentionally set the house on fire in order to make the prophecy come true. Secondly, even if the fire was just an accident, houses burn down all the time, so such an event is commonplace. Thirdly, one could argue that its destruction was inevitable. The house has a dark history, it has long been feared by the Scottish locals who had a motive to rid their community of what many perceived to be a place of great evil and bad luck.

In our analysis of *The Book of the Law* so far, we’ve seen that it is often ambiguous. Crowley wrote several commentaries on the book during his life, some of them interpreting its verses in very different ways compared to one another. In fact, *The Book of the Law* is so ambiguous that according to Crowley himself, it took over seventeen years to make sense of some parts of it [99]. Crowley fully acknowledges the ambiguity of the book, and offers the following justification:

The God wisely refrains from clear expression, so that the event, as it occurs, may justify His word. This progressive illumination of that word has served to keep it alive as no single revelation could have done. Every time that I have dived into Liber Legis [*The Book of the Law*] something has happened to rekindle it in my heart. [100]

Here Crowley is saying that the book is ambiguous by design and that this is a good thing because it keeps him engaged in its study. In fictional books, it is sometimes good to have ambiguity as it invites discussion as to the intended meaning. However, religious books like *The Book of the Law* are looked to as a source of guidance by their followers, so the meaning needs to be clear. Moreover, the whole point of a prophecy is to bring your attention to specific events ahead of time. If the prophecy is so ambiguous then it has little predictive power, which defeats the entire purpose of prophecy.

Another major issue with *The Book of the Law* which calls into question its supernatural authorship is the presence of failed prophecies. For example:

I am the Snake that giveth Knowledge & Delight and bright glory,
and stir the hearts of men with drunkenness. To worship me take
wine and strange drugs whereof I will tell my prophet, & be drunk
thereof! They shall not harm ye at all. It is a lie, this folly against
self... [101]

Here the book informed Crowley that he could indulge in intoxicants such as alcohol and drugs (“take wine and strange drugs”) and it would not harm him in the least (“They shall not harm ye at all”). Crowley seems to have taken this to heart, experimenting with many different drugs throughout his life and incorporating them into his magic rituals. Our understanding of the long-term impact of alcohol and drug abuse on the human body has come a long way in the more than one hundred years since *The Book of the Law* was written. Numerous studies have shown that addiction, mental illness, and diseases such as cancer are just some of the negative effects of such intoxicants [102]. Crowley’s personal struggle with drug addiction is well documented [103]. His health gradually

declined after he reached the age of fifty. He passed away in Hastings, England, on December 1, 1947. According to his death certificate, he died from myocardial degeneration and chronic bronchitis, exasperated by chronic heroin use [104]. Contrary to this prophecy, the use of drugs most certainly did harm him. One final point about Crowley's lifelong drug habit is that his use of mind-altering substances casts doubt on his credibility as a prophet. His mystical encounter with the being he called Aiwass could just be a delusion caused by his drug-fuelled rituals, rather than a genuine supernatural experience.

Another example of a failed prophecy is the following:

There cometh a rich man from the West who shall pour his gold
upon thee. [105]

Here the book predicted that Crowley would one day have riches bestowed upon him by a wealthy man from the West. A study of Crowley's life as a magician shows that this prediction never came to pass. Before getting involved in magic, Crowley started off in life very wealthy, inheriting his father's fortune at a young age. This was a substantial sum of money, in modern terms he would have been a multi-millionaire. During adulthood he lived a lavish lifestyle, with his magical pursuits being funded by his own considerable wealth. By the mid-1930s he was in serious financial difficulty, his heavy drug addiction only exacerbating the situation. He was even declared bankrupt when he was unable to pay his numerous creditors [106]. Near the end of his life he was reduced to living in a small room in a boarding house, surviving off the small royalties from his published works. Contrary to the prophecy, no one rescued Crowley from financial ruin by showering him in gold. He spent his final years in relative obscurity, reviled for his outrageous activities and impoverished by the financial extravagances of his youth. Another point about this failed prophecy is that Crowley was a Westerner, and being wealthy at one point himself he would have moved in wealthy social circles and therefore had contacts with Western people who were wealthy. So this is a prophecy that was very likely to come true, it would not have been

unusual for one of his wealthy friends or acquaintances to rescue him from ruin by showering him in gold, but it still did not happen.

Yet another example of a failed prophecy is the following:

Let the Scarlet Woman beware! If pity and compassion and tenderness visit her heart; if she leave my work to toy with old sweetnesses; then shall my vengeance be known. I will slay me her child: I will alienate her heart: I will cast her out from men: as a shrinking and despised harlot shall she crawl through dusk wet streets, and die cold and an-hungered. [107]

Here, *The Book of the Law* issues a chilling warning to Crowley's 'Scarlet Women', the name that Crowley used for his female sex magic practitioners. If they abandoned this religion, then they and their children would suffer a horrible fate. It's clear that Crowley understood this prophecy not to be a warning to one particular individual but rather to be a general warning to all of his Scarlet women, as he wrote: "Let the next upon whom the cloak may fall beware!" [108]. Crowley's first Scarlet Woman was his wife Rose Kelly who he married in 1903. He divorced Rose in 1909, and in 1911 he had her committed to a mental asylum for alcohol dementia. She died in 1932. During their marriage, Rose bore Crowley two children. Their first child, Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith, died in infancy in 1906 whilst they were still married.

Does the horrible fate of his wife and child make this a remarkable prediction? Remember that Crowley interpreted this prophecy to be a general warning to all his Scarlet Women, so if there is substance to the prophecy then we would expect to see similar fates for all others who abandoned his religion. Yet what we find is that this is not the case, as Crowley had numerous Scarlet Women during his life, many of whom left him and returned to their former lives. Contrary to the prophecy, they went on to live perfectly normal lives. They worked, got married, had families, and lived to see old age. For example, Leah Hirsig, the most famous of Crowley's Scarlet Women, was abandoned by him in the bitter-

est of circumstances. She later returned to her former career as a teacher, remarried, and even rejected Crowley's status as a prophet [109]. All of these actions on her part are violations which fall foul of the prophecy, and yet she died in 1975, having lived to the old age of 91.

In this section we have analysed a number of the prophecies of *The Book of the Law*. The general ambiguity of the book, together with its failed prophecies, means that it is far more likely to be the product of Crowley's own imagination rather than any supernatural intelligence. These are the findings of Professor Joshua Gunn who argued that the stylistic similarities between *The Book of the Law* and Crowley's own poetic writings were too great for it to be anything other than Crowley's work:

Although Crowley sincerely believed that *The Book of the Law* was inspired by superhuman intelligences, its clichéd imagery, overwrought style, and overdone ecophonetic displays are too similar to Crowley's other poetic writings to be the product of something supernatural. [110]

Superstition in Secular Societies

Virtually every culture that has ever existed has its own superstitious beliefs and practices, and many are shared across cultures. For example, knocking on wood for good luck is one of history's most enduring superstitions. It comes from thousands of years of mythology, folklore, and religious belief that trees were sacred [111]. Salt is another example, for thousands of years it has been an object of magic and superstition. Spilling salt was believed to be a bad omen. Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper shows Judas knocking over the salt - a harbinger of his betrayal [112].

While many of the superstitions like the ones mentioned are harmless, they can have more serious consequences. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw thousands of women being tortured and killed as a result of

Europe's witch trials [113]. These trials were heavily driven by superstition as the masses believed that all misfortunes were to be blamed on the supernatural. The combination of superstition and subjective evidence all combined to produce an environment where accusations of witchcraft were easy to make and prove. So widespread was the hysteria surrounding witches that in 1597 King James I of England wrote his famous dissertation *Daemonologie* on magic and witchcraft, several years prior to the first publication of the King James Authorised Version of the Bible. One of the tests that were devised to determine whether a woman was guilty of witchcraft was the infamous "swimming test". The accused were bound and then tossed into a body of water to see if they would sink or float. It was believed that an innocent person would sink like a stone, but a witch would float on the surface [114]. The victim typically had a rope tied around their waist so they could be pulled from the water if they sank, but it wasn't unusual for accidental drowning deaths to occur. Another example of a test was the "prayer test". Medieval wisdom held that witches were incapable of speaking scripture aloud, so accused sorcerers were made to recite selections from the Bible—usually the Lord's Prayer—without making mistakes or omissions. Still, even a successful prayer test didn't guarantee an acquittal. During the Salem Witch Trials, the accused sorcerer George Burroughs flawlessly recited the prayer from the gallows just before his execution. The performance was dismissed as a devil's trick, and the hanging proceeded as planned [115]. Another test was the "Devil's mark". Witch-hunters often had their suspects stripped and publicly examined for signs of an unsightly blemish that witches were said to receive upon making their pact with Satan [116]. It was easy for even the most minor physical imperfections to be labelled as the work of the Devil himself, so examiners rarely came up empty-handed.

In our age, people may laugh at such examples, but superstitions retain surprising power today. Ancient superstitions have in fact become secular traditions in the modern age. Many of us, even in secular societies, perform daily acts and sayings that are rooted in superstition without even realising it. For example, when it comes to weddings, nearly every Western nuptial rite is rooted in age-old superstition. A new husband

carries his wife over the threshold, in ancient Rome this was done because it was believed a bride who stumbles would bring bad luck [117]. Matching bridesmaid dresses also go back to ancient Rome, where they were supposed to distract evil spirits from the wife-to-be [118]. Superstitions even feature in our everyday language. For example, we've all put bad days down to having "gotten up on the wrong side of the bed". Yet in the world of folklore and superstition, it was believed that standing on the left foot first when getting out of bed brought bad luck [119].

There are people today who take advantage of our superstitious tendencies by claiming that they can predict and influence future events. Many even make careers out of such claims. It's out of the scope of this book to cover all of them, but we will look at some of the most popular forms today in secular societies, such as psychics, tarot cards, and palmists. Psychics are people who claim to be able to identify information hidden from the normal senses. With tarot, the card reader will randomly shuffle a deck of picture cards and derive information about a subject based on the order and pictures on the cards. Palmists use the markings on a person's hand to derive their readings. Although the methodology of psychics, tarot card readers and palmists differ, the practitioners all use a technique known as cold reading. Based on visual information that is immediately available, such as gender, age, and clothing, the practitioner will 'warm' the subject up by telling them things that are more likely than not to be true based on the visual clues. For example, the practitioner might spot that you are wearing certain clothing or jewellery and correctly conclude that you are wealthy. Or they might even generalise and say something like "you have a hidden scar on your body". Of course, many of us fell down or had accidents as children and have scars, so this would be a good bet to make. These simple techniques put the subject into a state of suggestibility. After this, they're more suggestible and more likely to play along. So now they can start to make vague guesses, and based on the subject's body language and verbal reactions, the practitioner can easily gather a great deal of detailed information. They will quickly move on from wrong guesses and hone in on any correct ones. With the victim warmed up and in a suggestible state, they are more likely to overlook many wrong

guesses and will focus on the few correct ones. Practitioners rely on our ability to remember “hits” and forget “misses” – a form of selective bias. Manipulative psychology also plays a part, as the practitioner will often say highly complementary things about you as an individual so your mind wants to accept what they say as fact. They might also say things that cause fear, such as hinting that a tragic event is going to happen to you or your family, which most people will naturally be intrigued by. Many people end up believing that psychics, tarot card readers, and palmists really can decipher the future, and this includes the practitioners themselves. Not all practitioners are necessarily liars, as some may convince themselves that they have some kind of special ability because of the few lucky guesses that they will inevitably make. The demand for such ‘services’ is so high that even in wealthy secular societies it’s not uncommon to find psychics, tarot card readers, and palmists in the major city centres like New York, London, and Tokyo.

Numerology is another popular form in society today. It is the idea that there is a mystical relationship between a number and one or more coinciding events. In Western cultures, the fear of “unlucky” number 13 is so common that it has a name, triskaidekaphobia. Even people who are otherwise rational in all walks of life might avoid flying on a plane on Friday the 13th. Some cities skip “13th Avenue,” and some buildings go directly from the 12th floor to the 14th floor. Interestingly, the same number 13 was considered a holy number in ancient Egypt and today is considered a lucky number in Japan [120]. In Eastern countries like China, Japan, and South Korea, tetraphobia (fear of the number four) is common. This is possibly because of the similarity in pronunciation of the word “four” and the word “death” [121]. It’s not unusual for buildings in these countries to skip the fourth floor, they go directly from the 3rd floor to the 5th floor. For Westerners, four has no special meaning. The number 7 is considered lucky in the West, whereas in China it has both positive and negative connotations. From a rational standpoint, this goes to show that numbers have no inherent lucky or unlucky value. If the number 13, for example, really brought bad luck, then this would be consistently the case across history and all cultures. One final point is

that people who claim to be psychic, deal in tarot cards, perform palm reading, and practise numerology often charge others money for their services. For the sake of argument, if any of these practices really do give insight into the future and can influence it, then why not predict or influence the lottery numbers?

Conclusion

In this chapter we have analysed many of the most popular systems of prophecy in history. Note that we have not considered prophecies that have yet to occur, as these are not necessarily failures. In other words, we need to make a distinction between failed prophecies, which are problematic, and unfulfilled prophecies, which may or may not come true one day, time will tell. We have covered a wide variety of individuals, ancient sacred texts, methods, and superstitions which today hold sway over the lives of millions of people. They do so on the basis that they are believed to have special insights such as an ability to see into the future. The claims that one can see into the future and even influence it are extraordinary, and extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. We have used the following criteria to scrutinise these different systems of prophecy:

- Accuracy: The predictions should closely match the events.
- Frequency: The predictions should be numerous.
- Clarity: The predictions should not be ambiguous in nature.
- Predictability: The predictions should not be the result of a perceptive mind. In other words, they should not be obvious to anyone who can analyse social and political circumstance and estimate outcomes.
- Integrity: The individuals making the predictions should not be in the habit of deceiving or lying to others.

These criteria have allowed us to analyse the extraordinary claims of these different systems of prophecy in an objective and methodical manner. We have seen that all have fallen short when put to the test. The purpose of spending time looking at these was to establish a benchmark to help us distinguish truth from falsehood. It's only when one has genuine insight into the future that one can make numerous detailed predictions and get it right every time. It's important to note that just because many of the most popular prophets in history fall short, it does not mean that no one in history has ever had a genuine insight into the future. In the next chapter we will see that there is one very special individual who stands out above all others.

CHAPTER 2

Muhammad

Muhammad was born in seventh century Mecca, which is in modern day Saudi Arabia. At the age of 40 he claimed to have encountered an angel of God, the Angel Gabriel, whilst he was meditating in a cave. This was the first of many encounters with the angel, who made the startling revelation that Muhammad had the mission of calling mankind back to the worship of the one true God. For the next 23 years, Muhammad received revelations from God through the Angel Gabriel. This collection of revelations is the Qur'an, the most sacred text of Islam. Muhammad taught that the Qur'an is God's final book of guidance intended for the whole of mankind. Muhammad is one of the most widely followed people in history, in fact it is estimated that today every one in four people on earth is Muslim, and they consist of people of all languages and races.

When it comes to unveiling the future, Islam teaches that only God has perfect knowledge of it and He decides how much to reveal to His Prophets. The Qur'an states: "[God is] Knower of the unseen, and He does not disclose His [knowledge of the] unseen to anyone, except whom He has approved of messengers..." [72:26-27]. The Qur'an confirms that Muhammad was inspired by God with a special insight into the future: "That is

from the news of the unseen which We reveal to you, [O Muhammad]. You knew it not, neither you nor your people, before this” [11:49]. In this chapter, we are going to put this claim to the test. If Muhammad really was inspired with such knowledge, then we would expect to see evidence of this in his teachings.

His Predictions

Throughout his 23 years of prophethood, Muhammad made numerous claims about many different events, in different times and places, which would transpire in the future:

1. Arab Bedouins Prophecy.

In the following prophecy, Muhammad was asked about the signs of the “Last Hour” (meaning the approach of the Day of Judgement). He stated that a very specific group of people would one day compete in the construction of tall buildings:

“Now, tell me of the Last Hour,” asked the man.

The Prophet replied, “The one asked knows no more of it than the one asking.”

“Then tell me about its signs,” said the man.

The Prophet replied, “That you see barefoot, unclothed herdsmen competing in the construction of tall buildings.” [122]

Notice the detailed characteristics that Muhammad provided: the barefoot, unclothed herdsmen were mentioned. When Muhammad was asked about the identity of these people, he responded by identifying the Arabs: “It was said: ‘Who are the barefoot herdsmen?’ He [Muhammad] answered: ‘The Arabs’” [123]. We can see that Muhammad prophesied that a very

specific group from among the Arabs, the barefoot, unclothed herdsmen, would one day compete in constructing tall buildings.

In fact, this detailed description refers to a very particular type of Arab, the Bedouins. From millennium past there are two types of Arabs, city dwellers and Bedouins. The former make up the majority and live in ancient cities like Damascus, Cairo, and Baghdad. In contrast, the Bedouins are nomads, they travel through the vast deserts and are constantly on the move. Even during the Golden Age of Islam when the Arabs were the richest and most learned people on earth, Bedouins remained in virtually the same state they had been for thousands of years, poor, uneducated and cut off from rest of the world. As recently as the 1940s the English explorer Sir Wilfred Thesiger was travelling through the deserts inhabited by the Bedouin and documented their condition:

As I listened I thought once again how precarious was the existence of the Bedu. Their way of life naturally made them fatalists; so much was beyond their control. It was impossible for them to provide for a morrow when everything depended on a chance fall of rain or when raiders, sickness, or any one of a hundred chance happenings might at any time leave them destitute, or end their lives. They did what they could, and no people were more self-reliant, but if things went wrong they accepted their fate without bitterness, and with dignity as the will of God. [124]

Many early Muslim scholars and classical commentators understood Muhammad's prophecy to be a reference to the Arab Bedouins who were known as the "people of the desert". The famous jurist Imam an-Nawawi (1233 – 1277) said the following in his interpretation of Muhammad's prophecy:

The people of the desert and their like are people of need and poverty. (A time will come) when the world will be laid open for them until they compete with one another in (the construction of) buildings, and God knows best. [125]

The renowned scholar Al-Qurtubi (1214 – 1273) said:

What is meant here is the prediction of a reversal in society whereby the people of the desert will take over the conduct of affairs and rule every region by force. They will become extremely rich and their primary concern will be to erect tall buildings and take pride in them. [126]

The respected scholar Ibn Hajar (1372 – 1449) said of the prophecy: “What is meant by them is the people of the desert” [127]. We can see that these early Muslim scholars and classical commentators, who were writing centuries ago, were consistent in their identification of the Arab Bedouins. This shows just how clear Muhammad’s description of these people was. Today we find in the Arabian Peninsula that a particular group of Arabs, the Bedouins who used to be impoverished herders of camels and sheep until the mid-twentieth century, are now competing to build the tallest tower blocks, just as Muhammad foretold. How did this change happen seemingly overnight? How did one of the poorest people on earth, who literally wore rags, become one of the wealthiest nations on earth? One thing made this rapid change possible, something upon which the modern world would revolve around perhaps more than any other, the discovery of “black gold”, oil. The seemingly empty deserts of the Bedouins had it in abundance. The Bedouins went from camels to Cadillacs in a generation!

Today one of the highest concentrations of tall buildings in the world is in the Arabian peninsula, specifically the areas in which Bedouin Arabs lived. In 2012 the tallest building in the world was the Mecca Clock Tower, standing at 601 metres, this gigantic structure was built in the desert city where Muhammad was born. Only two years after its completion, the Burj Khalifa was built in Dubai with a height of 828 metres. A short time after the Burj Khalifa was completed, a rival family in Saudi Arabia announced that they would build a taller one (1,000 metres); the Kingdom Tower. The Bedouin Arabs of today are literally competing with each other over who can build the world’s tallest building.

What would motivate Muhammed to even make such a prediction? If he was going to make up such a prophecy it would make more sense to relate this prophecy to the superpowers of his time: Rome, Persia, or even China who (unlike the Arabs) already had a tendency to construct extravagant buildings and palaces. For example, the Hagia Sophia cathedral was built by a Roman emperor in 537 CE, the century before Muhammad, and it remained the world's largest cathedral for nearly a thousand years. Furthermore, the immense detail that Muhammad provided in this prophecy is very revealing. Frauds, those who falsely claim to be able to predict the future, typically make their predictions general and ambiguous in nature so that they can be applied to multiple situations. The more general and ambiguous the prophecy, the greater the chance that something, somewhere, will eventually occur that bears enough of a resemblance that it will seem like the prophecy was an accurate prediction. Muhammad could have made a prediction such as "you will see the construction of tall buildings". Such a prediction uses very general descriptions that are flexible enough to be applied to anyone in the world. By comparison, the prophecy that Muhammad did make is filled with lots of very specific details. He gave a clear context for the building construction, that of competition. He also identified who the builders would be, the Arab Bedouins, by describing some unique distinguishing features such as their physical appearance ("barefoot and unclothed") and their way of life ("herdsmen"). We can see that such a prophecy contains multiple variables, each of which is very detailed and must be fulfilled in a very specific manner, which strictly limits how the event could happen.

The construction of tall buildings among the Arab Bedouins has even reached Mecca, Muhammad's city of birth. The last few decades have seen a massive surge in building construction in Mecca. The famous Mecca Clock Tower is currently the third tallest building in the world. In order for such construction to be possible, many of Mecca's ancient mountains have been demolished in order to make room for the tall buildings that have sprung up. Amazingly, this is also something that Muhammad foretold; he said that mountains will one day be moved

from their places: “The Hour will not be established until mountains are moved from their places” [128]. This tremendous feat of demolishing entire mountains has only been possible in the twentieth century with the advent of technology such as explosives. Thanks to these modern technical advances, mountains can now be blasted into rubble in order to make room for massive city infrastructure such as buildings and highways.

It’s important to point out that Muhammad himself did not like Muslims to be involved in trying to unnecessarily increase in wealth. Indeed he often warned of its dangers and how it would corrupt his nation. He did not like or promote the construction of extravagant buildings. He was a simple man who lived in a simple house and wanted other Muslims to maintain that simplicity. That is what he taught and how he lived. So, if he wanted to “will” this prophecy to become true, he would have encouraged the Arabs to build tall buildings and perhaps start off trying to do that himself! In fact the Qur’an itself discourages such behaviour: “Do you build on every height a monument? Vain is it that you do. And you make strong fortresses as if you were to live forever?” [26:128-129].

2. Byzantine comeback against Persia.

The Byzantine and Persian Empire were two leading super powers in the seventh century. In the year 602 CE, the world watched on as they went to all-out war. From the beginning, the Persian war machine overwhelmed the Byzantines who were facing internal rebellion and thus were at a disadvantage. After a series of devastating losses, the Byzantines couldn’t stop the Persian onslaught. Then the unthinkable happened, the city of Jerusalem, which was the heart of Christianity, was captured and desecrated by the Persians. The True Cross, a relic which Christians believe was the actual cross that Jesus was crucified on, was stolen and taken back to Persia. The Byzantines were Christian and the loss of Jerusalem was a major psychological blow for them. The war between the two empires was not just purely a political or

economically motivated one, there was a religious element to it. The world was one in which Christianity and Zoroastrianism were opposed to one another.

This great loss of the Byzantine Christians to the Persians made the idol worshippers of Arabia happy and they used this incident to mock the Muslims. Muhammad's close companion Ibn Abbas noted at the time: "The idolaters wanted the Persians to prevail over the Byzantines, because they were idol worshippers, and the Muslims wanted the Byzantines to prevail over the Persians, because they were people of the Book (Christians)" [129]. In response to these losses, Muhammad received some new revelation. The Qur'an made the following bold prediction:

The Byzantines have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory, within three to nine years. The whole matter rests with God before and after victory. [30:2-4]

The Qur'an prophesied that within 9 years the whole situation would be completely reversed with a Byzantine victory over the Persians. This prophecy was revealed in the year 615 CE when the Persians had completed their conquest of Syria [130]. This prediction of a Byzantine victory is the exact opposite of what political commentators would have predicted at the time, because the Byzantine Empire was badly losing and on the verge collapse. The Historian Edward Gibbon highlights the unlikelihood of the prophecy coming true:

Placed on the verge of the two great empires of the East, Mahomet [Muhammad] observed with secret joy the progress of their mutual destruction; and in the midst of the Persian triumphs, he ventured to foretell, that before many years should elapse, victory should again return to the banners of the Romans. At the time when this prediction is said to have been delivered, no prophecy could be more distant from its accomplishment, since the first twelve years of Heraclius announced the approaching dissolution of the empire. [131]

Even after Muhammad received revelation about a Byzantine victory, the situation for the Byzantines remained precarious. At one point, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius considered moving the Government that was based in the capital Constantinople to Carthage in Africa [132]. However, Persian conquests continued and they went on to defeat the Byzantines in Egypt and take over that province. As the Byzantines conceded territory they lost much needed tax revenues, and to add to their misery a plague broke out in 619 CE, which further damaged their tax revenues. After conquering Egypt, the Persian emperor Khosrow sent Heraclius the following letter:

Khosrow, greatest of Gods, and master of the earth, to Heraclius, his vile and insensate slave. Why do you still refuse to submit to our rule, and call yourself a king? Have I not destroyed the Greeks? You say that you trust in your God. Why has he not delivered out of my hand Caesarea, Jerusalem, and Alexandria? And shall I not also destroy Constantinople? But I will pardon your faults if you submit to me, and come hither with your wife and children; and I will give you lands, vineyards, and olive groves, and look upon you with a kindly aspect. Do not deceive yourself with vain hope in that Christ, who was not able to save himself from the Jews, who killed him by nailing him to a cross. Even if you take refuge in the depths of the sea, I will stretch out my hand and take you, whether you will or no. [133]

The situation for the Byzantines got so bad that according to the seventh century Armenian historian Sebeos, when the Persians reached Chalcedon, a city close to Constantinople which was the very heart of the Byzantine Empire, Heraclius had agreed to stand down and was ready to become a client of the Persian emperor [134].

Even though the Byzantine Empire was very far from a victory, in the year 622 CE, just 7 years after the Qur'an made its bold prediction, they started a counter attack. The Persians had set up an ambush in Cappadocia in modern day Turkey. This backfired when it was pre-

emptively discovered by Heraclius, so he lured the Persians into a trap and crushed them. This unexpected turn of events caught the Persians off guard and thus began a series of attacks by the Byzantines in which they recovered their prestige and their lands. In 624 CE, exactly 9 years after the Qur'an made its prophecy, the Byzantines had managed to avenge Jerusalem. They invaded the Persian heartland, defeated their army and then destroyed the famous Persian fire temple of Takht-i-Suleiman. Just as the desecration of Jerusalem and the theft of the True Cross was a psychological blow to the Christians, the destruction of the fire temple sent shock waves through Persia. Theophanes, a ninth century Byzantine historian, expressed his astonishment at this reversal of fortunes:

The Romans captured their (Persians') camp and all their gear. They raised their hands on high and thanked God; they also eagerly prayed for the Emperor, who led them well. For before they had never thought to see Persian dust; now they had found and plundered their still pitch tents. Who could have expected the invincible Persian race ever to show its back to the Romans? [135]

The prophecy came true in exactly the time frame that the Qur'an stipulated. There are so many ways in which this prophecy could have gone wrong if Muhammad was guessing. For example, if the Byzantines started their counter attack in year 625 rather than 622 then the fulfilment of the prophecy would have been outside of the 3 to 9 year time frame. If Muhammad was guessing then he would have said that the Persians will win as that was the trend at the time. Why would he risk the Qur'an's reputation by claiming that a Byzantine battlefield victory would happen in such a short time?

3. The defeat of Rome and Persia.

One of the greatest hardships to befall Muhammad was the Battle of the Trench. In the year 627 CE, a coalition army of pagan Arabs, numbering 10,000 men [136], attacked the only Muslim city in the world

at the time, Medina. This was a good opportunity for the enemies of Islam to wipe out Muslims from the face of the earth. The Muslims were outnumbered three to one, and for two whole weeks they were under siege. The Qur'an vividly describes the dire situation faced by the Muslims:

They massed against you from above and below; your eyes rolled [with fear], your hearts rose into your throats, and you thought [ill] thoughts of God. There the believers were sorely tested and deeply shaken. [33:10-11]

Shortly before the battle commenced, whilst the Muslims were digging a trench around the city of Medina in preparation for the impending attack, when they were facing impossible odds and were staring in the face of certain defeat, Muhammad made a bold prediction:

Al-Bara said: On the Day of Al-Khandaq (the trench) there stood out a rock too immune for our spades to break up. We therefore went to see God's Messenger for advice. He took the spade, and said: "In the Name of God" Then he struck it saying: "God is Most Great, I have been given the keys of Ash-Sham (Greater Syria). By God, I can see its red palaces at the moment;" on the second strike he said: "God is Most Great, I have been given Persia. By God, I can now see the white palace of Madain;" and for the third time he struck the rock saying: "In the Name of God," shattering the rest of the rock, and he said: "God is Most Great, I have been given the keys of Yemen. By God, I can see the gates of San'a while I am in my place." [137]

Muhammad made the astonishing claim that the Muslims would not only take the lands of Yemen and Greater Syria, which was under the occupation of the Roman empire, but that they would also defeat the mighty Persian empire, one of world's great superpowers. In another prediction, Muhammad even specified the exact Persian king who would be defeated, the king Kisra:

The Messenger of God said, "I swear by the Being who controls my life! God shall bring this [i.e. Islam] to such completion that a veiled woman shall leave from Heera [a place in modern Iraq] all alone and perform Tawaf of the Ka'abah without the need of having someone accompany her. Without doubt, the treasures of Kisra bin Hurmuz shall also be conquered."

In astonishment, Adi bin Hatim said, "The treasures of Kisra bin Hurmuz?"

"Yes," replied the Messenger of God, "The treasures of Kisra bin Hurmuz.'" [138]

Notice the reaction of Adi bin Hatim, a companion of Muhammad. He reacted with absolute astonishment about the prediction of the conquest of Persia. This is because such statements by Muhammad were made at a time when no one could imagine that a small Muslim city state, under siege by the pagan Arabs, would reach such heights of power and strength. It's important to appreciate just how large and powerful the empires of Rome and Persia were at the time. The Roman empire stretched from Europe to North Africa. The Persian empire was also large, with its capital Ctesiphon one of the biggest cities in the world. By comparison, the Muslims were dwarfed both in terms of numbers and territory. They were much less experienced in war and lacked the advanced weaponry and tactics of their opponents. Professor of Islamic History Carole Hillenbrand highlights the military superiority of the Persians over the Muslims:

Much ink has been spilt on the phenomenon of the Islamic conquest, but few firm conclusions can be drawn...It seems unlikely that the Arabs possessed military superiority over their opponents. Certainly, they had no secret weapon, no new techniques. Indeed, in some military spheres they were inexperienced; they allegedly learned siege warfare, for example, from the Persians. They were also unfamiliar with how to fight naval engagements. [139]

Yet within just a decade of Muhammad's death, all these events came true. They were witnessed by the very companions of Muhammad who heard him make these prophecies. What is amazing is that after the death of Muhammad, Muslims attacked both of these militantly superior imperial empires simultaneously. Even though the Romans and Persians were rivals and had been competing for territory for over a century before Muhammad, because of their losses to the Muslims they joined forces and fought side by side against the Muslim army in a decisive battle at Firaz in modern day Iran. One hundred thousand Persians, Romans, and Christian Arabs fought against a less experienced, less equipped force of only twenty thousand Muslims [140]. Muslims defeated this coalition and went on to conquer all of Syria, Persia, and Yemen, just as Muhammad foretold.

What are the odds that the Muslims, who were small in number and lacked economic, military and political strength, could topple these superpowers of the world in such a short span of time? This is so improbable that it is like someone in our day and age making the claim that a small country, with a population of only a few tens of thousands of people and minimal economic and military strength, will topple the super powers of today such as the United States and Russia. The astonishing way that the Muslims defeated the superpowers captured the world by surprise, as historian Barnaby Rogerson explains:

You have to remember, that the two great superpowers were the Byzantine empire [Eastern Roman empire] and Sassanid Persia, they were the dominant powers. If you're putting it in a modern parlance it's a bit like the Eskimos taking on the United States of America and Russia. [141]

No rational person would conceive of such a possibility, and if Muhammad were guessing then he would have been risking his reputation as a Prophet by gambling on such unlikely predictions coming true. This sentiment is echoed by historians who cannot explain how Islam became such a dominant force so quickly. Professor of Byzantine studies

Andrew Louth wrote: “The speed with which the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire succumbed to the Arabs remains to be explained by historians” [142].

4. Spread of sexual immorality.

Muhammad revealed that the day would come when sexual immorality would become so normalised that it would be carried out in public: “The Hour will not be established until people fornicate with each other in the road just as donkeys fornicate” [143]. Today we live in a world where we are bombarded with explicit sexual imagery in TV, film, and advertising. With the advent of the internet, pornography is readily available at any time and any place. In fact, people have been arrested for having sex in public places. What is amazing is that we’ve already seen that Muhammad foretold that Islam is going to spread far and wide, so this situation of public sexual immorality is the exact opposite of what one would expect because Islam as a religion places great emphasis on modesty. For example, Islam teaches that both men and women should lower their gaze from strangers in order to safeguard from falling into temptation and sin. The reality of today, where Islam is widespread and public sexual immorality is rampant, is in fact paradoxical and therefore not the most rational prediction to make if one is guessing.

We must also take into account that at the time of Muhammad, people were generally modest; this was the case with both Muslims and non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians. With the conversion of the pagan Roman empire to Christianity in the fourth century, the subsequent spread of Christianity throughout Europe, and the Catholic Church enforcing strict standards of public morality and decency, much of the Western world had become conservative before Muhammad was born. During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church regulated all matters relating to sex very carefully. Many influential members of the Church even saw sex and other pleasurable experiences within the confines of marriage as evil and a source of sin, unless marital relations were undertaken expressly

and consciously to conceive a child [144]. A big transformation also took place in seventh century Arabia. In pre-Islamic Arabia, public indecency was not uncommon, for example we know that the pagan Arabs used to perform religious pilgrimages while in a completely naked state. This all ended with the coming of Islam which forbade such practices. With both the East and the West being largely conservative as a result of the spread of Abrahamic religions like Christianity and Islam, this prediction of widespread sexual immorality by Muhammad went completely against the tide of morality that was sweeping the world during his time. The current situation in the world is unprecedented, never in the history of mankind has sexual immorality been on such a large scale. It is now the norm, just as Muhammad predicted. An interesting side point is that Muhammad described the consequences of widespread sexual immorality: "Never does sexual perversion become widespread and publicly known in certain people without them being overtaken by disease that never happened to their ancestors who came before them." [145] The increase of sexual immorality has seen the emergence of previously unheard of diseases such as AIDS, just as Muhammad warned.

5. A world steeped in interest.

Muhammad claimed that interest would one day become so dominant that even those who try to avoid it will not be able to avoid being impacted by it:

The Messenger of God said, "A time will come upon mankind when they will consume interest." They said to him, "Is that all of the people?" The Prophet said, "Whoever does not take from it will be afflicted by its dust." [146]

This clearly describes the state of the world economy today. As Muhammad predicted, in the modern world it is virtually impossible to avoid dealing with, or at the very least being impacted by, interest. Just think about how many people have interest-bearing bank accounts, buy things using credit cards, and are only able to afford to purchase a home through an interest-based mortgage. Even if one somehow manages to avoid

dealing in interest directly, almost every aspect of our lives is impacted by it. Virtually every country in the world, even those considered to be wealthy, is drowning in interest-based debt. The United States, for example, is currently wrestling with a debt of trillions of dollars. Central banks influence the purchasing power of our money, and the financial system even suffered a global collapse in 2008 because of the widespread practice of buying and selling interest-based financial debt. This was a disaster which has plunged the world into economic turmoil, the consequences of which will be felt for generations to come.

What makes Muhammad's prediction amazing is that the financial state of the world over the last century is unique in history. At the time of Muhammad, finance was based on commodities with intrinsic value, such as gold and silver coins. Gold and silver have been used as the most common form of currency throughout history. In many languages, such as Spanish and French, the word for silver is still directly related to the word for money. Even with the advent of paper money, there was still a dependence on gold and silver. Initially, paper money was backed by gold and silver. Every paper note that people possessed could be redeemed for gold at the bank on demand. In 1933, the United States abandoned the world Gold Exchange Standard system, bringing to an end the existing world monetary system. The paper money that people held in their hands was no longer backed by physical gold. Under this new global monetary system, money only has value because governments say it does. Unlike gold and silver, modern paper money is intrinsically valueless. Consequently, we now have a system where banks can print as much money as they wish as they no longer have the restriction of being tied to physical reserves of gold. Under the current system money is literally conjured out of thin air. Since banks can now print money on demand, it means that they can lend more money which in turn results in the creation of more interest-based debt.

We are living in a time that can only be considered monetary chaos, as our entire monetary system, as it now stands, is based on nothing but debt. Every physical coin and paper note has to be borrowed into

existence. With the old system of gold and silver there is a natural order to money, as its value increases and decreases in accordance with the supply and demand of the precious metals. Under the current system, banks can produce as much paper money as they like, and so the supply of this form of money is entirely elastic, it is entirely flexible. In summary, modern finance is a debt and interest based system that is unique in history. The use of paper money with no intrinsic value, along with the massive debt and interest that it has resulted in, is a phenomenon of modern finance and not something that could have been easily guessed by Muhammad over 1,400 years ago. Now this is not to say that the concept of interest did not exist at all in seventh century Arabia, we know that it did because the Qur'an strictly prohibits believers from practising it: "...they say, 'Trade is [just] like interest.' But God has permitted trade and has forbidden interest. So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with God. But whoever returns to [dealing in interest] - those are the companions of the Fire..." [2:275]. Moreover, the practice of interest was also prohibited in the Christian world. The Roman Catholic Church had by the fourth century prohibited the taking of interest by the clergy; a rule which they extended in the fifth century to the laity. In the eighth century it was even declared a criminal offence [147]. So Muhammad's prediction that it would come to dominate the world was in no way a forgone conclusion. In fact, it must have seemed strange to his companions, since Muhammad had also predicted that Islam, which strictly forbids interest, would dominate over all religions and reach as far as the East and West. The fact that this prophecy was preserved by his companions shows the complete faith and trust that they had in what he said, and that it would come to pass, however unlikely it may have seemed to them.

6. Prevalence of writing and increase in ignorance.

Many of us take for granted the abundance of books that are available in the modern age. However, the majority of people in history have never even held a book in their hands. One reason is the lack of education as

most people used to be illiterate so there was not a big demand for books. Another reason is scarcity; books were difficult and expensive to produce because each copy had to be written manually by hand. This has been the norm for most of human history, and seventh century Arabia was no different. Muhammad was born into a society in which very few people could read or write. It is estimated that the number of people who were literate in his locality of Mecca did not exceed seventeen [148]. Muhammad himself could not read or write. There were even whole societies that didn't have any books, they didn't write anything down because they only had an oral language.

Against this backdrop, Muhammad made the prediction that writing will one day become prevalent among mankind:

Ahead of the Hour, people will only greet those whom they know;
trade will become so widespread that a woman will help her husband in his trade; ties of kinship will be severed; people will bear false witness and conceal true testimony; and the pen will prevail.
[149]

This prediction by Muhammad is in fact loaded with accurate prophecies. The statement "people will only greet those whom they know" has been fulfilled by the advent of densely populated cities of the modern age where it is common for people not to speak to their neighbours [150]. The statement "a woman will help her husband in his trade" has been fulfilled by women entering the workforce in large numbers, especially in Western societies [151]. The statement that "ties of kinship will be severed" has been fulfilled by the breakdown of traditional family values. Such values, which have long been the fabric of society, are now broken [152]. One symptom of this is the increasing number of old people who are put into care homes by their families. It has also been fulfilled by the breakdown of community values; one symptom of which is the whole philosophy of liberalism that has swept the majority of the 'modern' world, a philosophy that is based on individualism and individual rights over the rights of a

community. For the sake of this section, we will focus in detail on the statement that “the pen will prevail”. The Arabic word used by Muhammad for pen is ‘qalam’ which also carries the wider meaning of writing, or anything that is written down in general [153]. This perfectly describes our world today in which it is the norm for people to read and write and there is an abundance of books, newspapers, and magazines. This has only been made possible thanks to fifteenth century technological advances such as printing that took place over 800 years after Muhammad’s prophecy. For the first time in history, written materials could be produced in vast quantities. The increased efficiency of book production brought with it a decrease in prices and a subsequent increase in book consumption as they were now affordable to the masses. To put this into perspective, the fifteenth century saw about the same number of manuscripts printed in Europe as had been produced by hand during the entire preceding fourteen centuries [154]. With the advent of the internet, writing is spreading even more. Anybody with a computer or smart phone now has access to millions of books with just the click of a finger. It’s quite powerful that Muhammad, who could neither read nor write, prophesied the spread of reading and writing.

It’s important to point out that book production, and knowledge in general, has not always been on the increase as time goes on. From the sixth century, the Catholic Church made a concerted effort to protect and bolster its position of dominance and power. It closed institutes of philosophy, banned books, and suppressed any scientific thought that threatened its own biblical outlook of the world. The masses were forbidden from owning the Bible and authors were even burnt alive for writing books that opposed the Catholic Church’s religious doctrines. The ancient Greek chronicler John Malalas recorded: “During the consulship of Decius [529 CE], the Emperor issued a decree and sent it to Athens ordering that no one should teach philosophy nor interpret the laws” [155]. As a result, Europe entered into a 1,000 year period of intellectual slumber. Thus the “lights went out” on rational thinking and Europe entered the Dark Ages. Indeed, Europe’s

creative energies and inventiveness are acknowledged much later, only from the dawn of the “scientific revolution” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In addition to predicting that writing would become prevalent, Muhammad also foretold that another sign of the end of the world would be that “ignorance will become widespread and there will be much killing” [156]. Here Muhammad stated that there will be widespread ignorance and evil acts such as killing. The twentieth century is without question the bloodiest century in history, far worse in terms of global devastation than any previous era. While fatality statistics vary, the First and Second World Wars alone have seen estimates of total deaths ranging from 50 million to more than 80 million. We have also witnessed mass genocides that have sadly resulted in the deaths of tens of millions. As time goes on, mankind continues to develop weapons with greater potential for death and destruction. The twentieth century saw the development of atomic weapons as well as their use on civilian populations. There are now nuclear weapons capable of destroying entire cities, with governments having stockpiled enough nukes to destroy the entire earth multiple times over. This is despite the fact that the masses can read and have access to more education and learning than at any other time in history. We have a strange situation of knowledge being more readily available to mankind and yet killing being rampant. Both these predictions by Muhammad are, when taken together, quite paradoxical. If Muhammad were guessing then he would have predicted an increase in writing and decrease in ignorance due to mankind’s enlightenment. But he actually predicted two opposites, this paradoxical situation of writing being prevalent and evil acts such as killing being widespread. The historian Niall Ferguson notes this paradox of our modern age:

Why? What made the twentieth century, and particularly the fifty years from 1904 until 1953, so bloody? That this era was exceptionally violent may seem paradoxical. After all, the hundred years after 1900 were a time of unparalleled progress. [157]

7. The greening of Arabia's deserts.

Muhammad made a bold prediction about the state of the land of the Arabs: "The Hour will not begin until the land of the Arabs once again becomes meadows and rivers" [158].

This narration anticipated the greening of Arabia's extensive dry desert environment. As recently as 1986, there was little to no agricultural activity in the region. However, over the last few decades these deserts have been transformed to grow grains, fruits, and vegetables thanks to techniques such as centre pivot irrigation. This is a process that pumps water to the surface from deep underground reserves, some of which date back to the last ice age 20,000 years ago. This fossil water is distributed via large feeds and results in circles of green irrigated vegetation. The diameters of these irrigated crop circles range from a few hundred metres to as wide as 3 kilometres (1.9 miles).

Even without human intervention, the Arabian desert is forecast to become green in the future. Science writer Jason Daley explains: "In fact, the cyclical nature of Green Arabia means that sometime in the future the area will once again be lush and full of vegetation, though researchers aren't sure exactly when that might happen, and whether climate change in general will put a damper on the greening" [159].

Now put yourself in the position of a person living in seventh century Saudi Arabia. This region hosts some of the most extensive sand and gravel deserts in the world with rainfall that averages just ten to twenty centimetres per year. To put this into context, some parts of the United Kingdom average over four hundred centimetres per year. Could anyone inhabiting such a harsh environment ever rationally conceive of the possibility that one day there would be a plentiful supply of water and abundant crops? Muhammad stood to gain nothing by making such an outrageous prediction, moreover

it was no light matter, as it gave his enemies a reason to mock and undermine him as a Prophet. But this was important information that had to be conveyed, for it is a sign of the closeness of the End Times and therefore of immense benefit to the generations who would follow after him. Muhammad did not fear the mockery of men, for he was not speaking from his whims; he had no doubt that the prophecy would transpire as this was inspiration from the heavens. Today this prophecy is unfolding before our very eyes, and is only possible thanks to ancient reserves of water buried deep beneath the desert sands, as well as modern advancements in irrigation technology to mine that water. This is technology that could not have been imagined by Muhammad over 1,400 years ago.

This prophecy also makes a claim about the ancient past. Note the words of Muhammad:

“...the land of the Arabs once again becomes meadows and rivers”

By saying “once again” he is implying that at one stage in their history, the deserts were lush with vegetation and life and that they will be returning to this former state. Geologists now know that the Arabian Peninsula was indeed once filled with meadows and rivers in ancient times. Modern archaeological discoveries have uncovered a number of fossils which confirm this. Michael Petraglia is Professor of Human Evolution and Prehistory, Senior Research Fellow and the Co-Director of the Centre for Asian Archaeology, Art & Culture, School of Archaeology, University of Oxford. He was asked: “What has the team unearthed about the ancient environment of Saudi Arabia?” He replied:

One of the first things that we did was remote sensing. We looked at satellite images for example, and found that there are literally thousands of ancient rivers that crisscrossed Saudi Arabia. We also now count 10,000 ancient lakes. The most amazing thing, to me, are the fossil finds. They say something about the kinds of animals that

could migrate into Arabia. We have fossils of elephants; these were gigantic creatures, much larger than the African elephant. Amazingly, we also have hippos. These finds tell you something of how wet it really was. Because hippos cannot survive in very arid and dry situations, so the environment had to be green for them to survive. So, there were surely lots of lakes and rivers all across Arabia, and there was plenty of grass with vegetation for these animals to consume. [160]

So not only did this prophecy correctly predict the greening of Arabia in the future, it also conforms to modern archaeological discoveries and conclusions about Arabia's ancient, pre-Islamic past. There are so many ways that Muhammad could have been wrong, for example he could have claimed that "God will bless Arabia with greenery and rivers for the first time". Or, he could have made an easier claim that would have seemed more logical to people at the time such as "Arabia will always remain dry and barren". His ancient prediction about the past and the future cannot be explained naturalistically as he did not have access to modern technology that helped discover the history and future of Arabia's geology.

8. The rapid spread of Islam and the decline of the Muslims.

Muhammad prophesied that the Islamic civilisation would spread throughout the world: "God folded the earth for me, and I saw its east and west, and the dominion of my nation will reach as far as the earth was folded for me" [161].

In this prophecy, Muhammad made the claim that the religion of Islam would spread to the far reaches of the earth. It's important to understand the context in which this prediction was made. Not only were the Muslims surrounded by their enemies, which included the super powers of the world and numerous pagan Arab tribes, but they also had the additional internal challenge of disunity due to tribalism. Prior to Islam, it was not uncommon for one Arab tribe to go to war with another over the small-

est of disputes. Blood feuds were regular occurrences between tribes and often lasted generations.

History bears witness to the fact that Islam spread rapidly, both East and West, to reach as far as Spain and parts of China, just as Muhammad boldly foretold. At the time, this was a geographic expansion the likes of which the world had never witnessed. The Islamic empire was the largest the world had ever seen, a fulfilment of Muhammad's prediction as well as the promise that God made to the Muslims in the Qur'an:

God has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. [24:55]

To put this into perspective, let's compare the other Abrahamic faiths, Judaism and Christianity. During their early histories, both religions were mainly concentrated in Palestine and its surrounding areas. There were pockets of followers in other lands, but their early expansion was restrained by the pagan nations that surrounded them. On multiple occasions, the entire Jewish people were taken into captivity by their enemies. Christianity was a small, persecuted religion for hundreds of years until the pagan Roman Empire adopted Christianity as a state religion in the fourth century after Jesus.

Now it's not unusual for new civilisations to emerge, dominate for a period of time and then decline or even disappear entirely. It's also not uncommon for divided and dispersed tribes to unite under a charismatic leader and then conquer vast lands. The Mongols are a good example, their empire emerged after Islam, and at their peak in the thirteenth century they controlled the largest continuous land empire in human

history. The difference however, is that unlike the Islamic empire, the Mongol empire collapsed within a century.

We have analysed accurate predictions that Muhammad made in regard to Islam's toppling of superpowers and global expansion. Muhammad not only informed us about the spectacular rise of the Muslims, he also foretold their decline:

"The nations will call each other and set upon you, just as diners set upon food." It was said: "Will it be because of our small number that day?" He said: "Rather, on that day you will be many, but you will be like foam, like the foam on the river. And God will remove the fear of you from the hearts of your enemies and will throw weakness into your hearts." Someone said: "O Messenger of God! What is this weakness?" He said: "Love of the world and the hatred for death."
[162]

Here we can see that Muhammad prophesied the dire circumstances in which the Muslims would find themselves. He said the day would come when Muslims will be large in number but in such a state of weakness that other nations will invite one another to set upon them. The analogy of Muslims being eaten as a meal was given, which emphasises just how helpless they will become. The cause of this weakness is said to be the love of the world and hatred for death. This means that Muslims would one day come to love the material world to the point where they become complacent in their religion, neglecting their obligations and forgetting about the eternal hereafter.

This prediction accurately describes the radical turn of events that took place in the Muslim world in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Prior to this, the Muslim lands had grown to be some of the most powerful in the world. From the time of the death of Muhammad until the nineteenth century, the Muslims had large empires which were economically, politically, militarily, technologically and educationally far ahead of most of the world. In the nineteenth and twentieth century

the unthinkable happened, nearly all of the Muslim world from Indonesia in the far east to Libya in the far west was occupied, colonised, and militarily defeated by non-Muslim nations. Russia had annexed the Caucuses; France controlled Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia; Great Britain occupied Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Mughal India; the Dutch controlled Malaysia and Indonesia. Of the 50 Muslim countries that exist today, only a few survived occupation and the ones that did were still subject to colonial masters. This is despite the large number of Muslims that existed at the time. In the early twentieth century, there were an estimated 200 million Muslims, representing 12.5% of the world's population [163]. But their considerable numbers could do nothing to prevent the defeat, the non-Muslim nations came, divided, conquered, and invited each other to take the Muslim lands, just as Muhammad foretold.

If we reflect on this prediction, it is quite counter-intuitive. Recall the reaction of the companion who heard Muhammad make the prediction, this person remarked "Will it be because of our small number that day?" The companion made the natural assumption that the weak state of the Muslims would be due to their small numbers, because large numbers are typically associated with strength. If this prediction was guesswork, then it would have made more sense to state that the Muslims would be diminished in number and that would be the cause of their weakness. Yet Muhammad predicted the exact opposite, a paradoxical situation of the Muslims being vast in number but very weak, and it came true. Another interesting aspect of this prediction is the psychology behind it. During Muhammad's lifetime, Islam was not yet a world superpower and had not yet toppled other superpowers like Persia. So if Muhammad was a liar who was out to deceive people into thinking he was a Prophet, he would surely have only said very positive things about the Muslims of the future, such as "you will be invincible" or "your enemies will never defeat you". Such a positive outlook of the future would make people want to join his religion and be his followers. Indeed, it's human nature to want to be successful. So for Muhammad to make such a frank statement about how bleak the future would become not

only shows that he was a speaker of truth, but also that his companions transmitted everything he said, regardless of whether it was good or bad, encouraging or embarrassing.

In summary, we've seen how Muhammad accurately foretold not only the spectacular rise of the Islamic empire as a world superpower, but also the subsequent political and military decline of the Muslims despite their large numbers. Historically speaking, when religions lose their influence on the world stage in such a way, it is usually followed by a stagnation or decline in the number of their followers. This is to be expected, as it is human nature to want to be associated with success. Yet Muhammad foretold the exact opposite with regards to the religion of Islam, he said that it will continue to grow in terms of the number of followers, to the extent that it will eventually enter every household: "This matter will certainly reach every place touched by the night and day. God will not leave a house or residence except that God will cause this religion to enter it" [164]. Today we are witnessing this very prophecy unfold before our eyes. Islam is currently the fastest growing religion in the world, with nearly one in four people on earth being a Muslim. It is forecast to be the world's largest religion by the year 2070 [165]. This is despite Islam being constantly attacked by the media, the colonisation of Muslim lands, and many wars that have been waged in the Muslim world.

The Preservation of the Qur'an and Hadith

At this stage you may be thinking, there is just no way that these prophecies could have been foretold over 1,400 years ago. Perhaps you believe they were written after the events took place, i.e. they are back-dated prophecies. We've already seen this with other false prophets of the past, so how can we be certain this is not also the case with Muhammad's predictions? The predictions we have analysed in

this section are taken from the Qur'an and Hadith. The Arabic word "hadith" broadly means a narrative, or a story. In Islamic literature, it has the very specific meaning of the individual narrations about Muhammad, which capture his many sayings and actions, as conveyed to us by his companions. The Arabic word "qur'an" literally means a recitation. Muslims believe that God chose Muhammad to be His final messenger, and revealed to Muhammad His final book of guidance for mankind, the Qur'an.

We can trust the information that has been conveyed to us in the Qur'an and Hadith because these Islamic source texts are the most reliable of any ancient or religious text in history, for a number of unique reasons. Unlike other ancient and religious texts, the primary means of preserving the Qur'an and Hadith has, and always will be, through memorisation. The Qur'an mentions its own preservation in this manner: "And We have certainly made the Qur'an easy for remembrance, so is there any who will remember?" [54:17]. Muhammad was tasked by God with memorising, transmitting, and explaining the verses of the Qur'an to the Muslims, as they were revealed from God to him through the Angel Gabriel: "Truly, this Qur'an has been sent down by the Lord of the Worlds: the Trustworthy Spirit [Angel Gabriel] brought it down to your heart [Prophet], so that you could bring warning" [26:192-194]. In turn, these Muslims who had learnt the Qur'an directly from Muhammad himself, known as the Companions, passed on what they had memorised of the Qur'an, as well as what they had witnessed Muhammad saying and doing (i.e. the Hadith), to neighbouring tribes and nations. This legacy of mass memorisation has continued throughout Islamic history. Muslims today have no doubt about the perfect preservation of the Qur'an and Hadith. This oral tradition spanning over 1,400 years has seen the Qur'an and Hadith being passed down from teacher to student in an unbroken chain going all the way back to Muhammad himself, without any mistakes or change in their wording. Today, it is estimated that there are many millions of Muslims who have memorised the Qur'an and Hadith, in their original Arabic.

Here are just a few examples of what some non-Muslim textual scholars have to say about the preservation of the Qur'an. The Orientalist scholar William Graham stated that:

In Muslim piety, however, the written word of its scripture has always been secondary to a strong tradition of oral transmission and aural presence of scripture that far surpasses that of Judaic or Christian usage. In Islam, the functions of the holy book as an oral text have predominated over its functions as a written or printed one. As an English Arabist put it long ago, "from first to last the Koran is essentially a book to be heard, not read." For countless millions of Muslims over more than thirteen centuries of Islamic history, "scripture", has been a book learned, read, and passed on by vocal repetition and memorization. [166]

The Orientalist A.T. Welch writes:

For Muslims the Qur'an is much more than scripture or sacred literature in the usual Western sense. Its primary significance for the vast majority through the centuries has been in its oral form, the form in which it first appeared, as the "recitation" chanted by Muhammad to his followers over a period of about twenty years... The revelations were memorized by some of Muhammad's followers during his lifetime, and the oral tradition that was thus, established has had a continuous history ever since, in some ways independent of, and superior to, the written Qur'an... Through the centuries the oral tradition of the entire Qur'an has been maintained by the professional reciters. Until recently, the significance of the recited Qur'an has seldom been fully appreciated in the West. [167]

Bible scholar Kenneth Cragg reflects that:

This phenomenon of Qur'anic recital means that the text has traversed the centuries in an unbroken living sequence of devotion. It cannot, therefore, be handled as an antiquarian thing, nor as a historical docu-

ment out of a distant past. The fact of hifdh (Qur'anic memorization) has made the Qur'an a present possession through all the lapse of Muslim time and given it a human currency in every generation, never allowing its relegation to a bare authority for reference alone. [168]

The scholar of Islam Sir William Muir, who was an ardent critic of Islam, states: "There is probably no other book in the world which has remained twelve centuries [now fourteen] with so pure a text" [169].

In fact, if every written copy of the religious scriptures in existence today were to be somehow destroyed, then it is only the Qur'an and Hadith that could be recreated perfectly, thanks to their mass memorisation. Those who memorise the Qur'an and Hadith are people of all ages. The vast majority are not Arabs and do not even speak Arabic as a language. The oral memorisation of the Qur'an and Hadith is a phenomenon unique to Islam.

Let's now take a look at the Hadith in more detail. Each Hadith consists of two aspects: a report and its chain of narration. The report is information about what was said or done by Muhammad, as witnessed by his companions. The chain is the sequence of people who have passed the report down to us. Knowing the chain that is associated with the report is crucial because without it anyone can make any claim they like about Muhammad and we would have no way of verifying whether it was an authentic report. Chains allow the scholars of Islam to distinguish authentic Hadith from weak and fabricated ones by scrutinising the chains. This methodology was pioneered by the early Muslim scholars and is known as the science of Hadith verification. Many different factors – such as the name of each individual in the chain who transmitted the report, their biographical information, the number of independent transmitters, and many others – are taken into account by the scholars of Islam. This level of scrutiny simply does not exist in any other ancient or religious tradition, including the Judaic and Christian traditions [170]. The scholars of Islam have dedicated their lives to evaluating the authenticity of the Hadith. Without such a methodology, we would have no way of reliably

distinguishing the authentic reports from the weak and even fabricated reports that have been attributed to him.

We can see that testimony is fundamental to the transmission of Hadith as we rely on the say-so of the companions who transmitted the reports. Can testimony be considered a reliable source of knowledge? Testimony is in fact an indispensable source of knowledge, this holds true for facts we would never deny. For many of us, these truths include the existence of Amazonian native tribes, photosynthesis, ultraviolet radiation, and bacteria. Let's elaborate further. How would you prove to a perfect stranger that your mother did in fact give birth to you? As bizarre as this question sounds, it will help clarify a very important yet underrated source of knowledge. You might say "my mother told me so", "I have a birth certificate", "my father told me, he was there", or "I have checked my mother's hospital records". These responses are valid; however, they are based on the statements of other people. Sceptical minds may not be satisfied. You may try to argue a basis for your conviction by using the 'DNA card' or by referring to video footage of your birth. The conviction that your mother is who she says she is isn't based on a DNA home test kit. The reality is that most of us have not taken a DNA test. It is also not based on video footage, as you still have to rely on the say-so of others to claim that the baby is actually you. So why are we so sure? This admittedly quirky example re-emphasises an important source of knowledge: testimony.

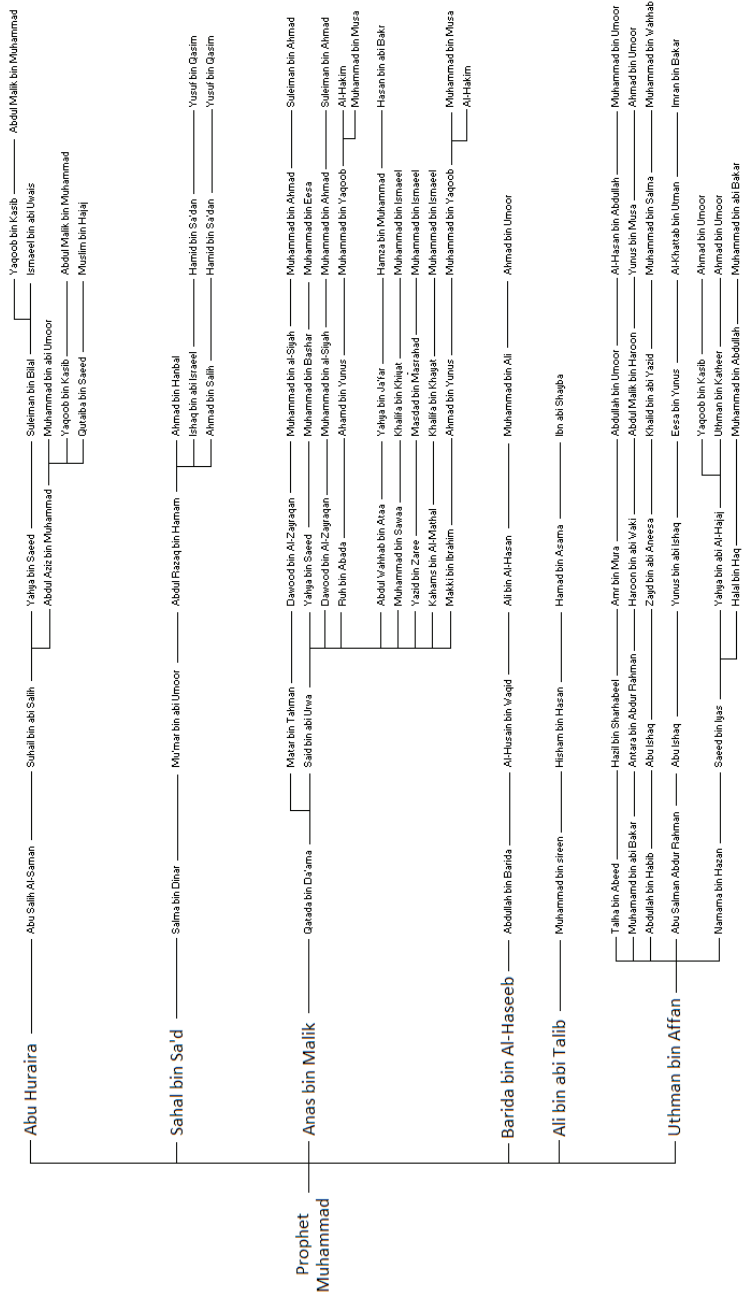
In fact, most of what we know is based on the say-so of others. The world being a sphere is a striking example. The belief that the world is a sphere is—for most of us—not based on mathematics or science. It is purely centred on testimony. Your initial reactions may entail the following statements "I have seen pictures", "I have read it in science books", "All my teachers told me", "I can go on the highest mountain peak and observe the curvature of the Earth", and so on. However, upon intellectual scrutiny, all of our answers fall under testimonial knowledge. Seeing pictures or images is testimonial because you have to accept the say-so of the authority or person who said it is an image

of the world. Learning this fact from science textbooks is also due to testimonial transmission, as you have to accept what the authors say as true. This also applies when referring to your teachers. Talk of attempting to justify your conviction by standing on the highest peak is still based on testimony, as many of us have never done such a thing. Your assumption that standing on the highest peak will provide you with evidence for the roundness of the Earth is based on the say-so of others. Even if you have done it before, it does not in any way prove the roundness of the Earth. Standing on a peak will only indicate that the Earth has some form of curvature—and is not a complete sphere (after all it can be semi-circular or shaped like a flower). In summary, for the majority of us, the fact that the world is round is not based on anything but testimony [171].

Let's now look at an example of a Hadith prophecy in detail. Here is a prophecy where Muhammad correctly foretold that two of his closest companions, Umar and Uthman, would die as martyrs:

Anas bin Malik reported: "The Prophet once climbed the mountain of Uhud with Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. The mountain shook with them. The Prophet said (to the mountain), 'Be firm, O Uhud! For on you there are no more than a Prophet, a truthful one and two martyrs'"

Notice that the report starts with the statement "Anas bin Malik reported". Anas bin Malik is a famous companion of Muhammad and he is narrating to us an incident in which Muhammad uttered the above prophecy. However we are not only relying on Anas bin Malik's testimony that Muhammad uttered these words, as this report reaches us through multiple chains of transmission. In other words, other companions of Muhammad also narrated the same prophecy. Here is a diagram summarising the names of the companions who narrated this report about Muhammad, as well as those who the companions passed the report onto [172]. Note that due to space constraints, the below diagram has been limited to seven generations of narrators after Muhammad:



We can see that this Hadith has a large amount of corroboration. It would be virtually impossible to fabricate such a report given that there are multiple independent chains, consisting of people from different times and places, and yet they all report the same Hadith. If they are all reporting the same thing, it means that the event was very likely to have happened, as suggesting otherwise would be to suggest some sort of mass conspiracy, among the companions, to fabricate lies. This is absurd to suggest because the companions were being killed and tortured during the time of Muhammad and fought and died for Islam for decades after Muhammad had died. To suggest they fabricated lies knowingly would mean all of these companions had died for an idea they knew they were lying about. Muslims have access to thousands of such authentic statements of Muhammad. These can be found in the famous collections of authentic Hadith in books such as Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. In fact, if you look at the references at the back of this book, you will notice that I have utilised authentic Hadiths from collections such as Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim in my quotations of Muhammad's prophecies earlier in this chapter.

Is there any reason to doubt the reliability of the Qur'an and Hadith? The estimated millions who have memorised them have done so via a direct transmission starting from Muhammad himself. The implications of this are astonishing. If millions of people who have memorised them can trace their oral memorisation down the centuries of teachers and scholars, all the way back to Muhammad himself, who could doubt the authenticity of this oral tradition? This is especially so if these millions of memorisers live in different places in the world, and have learnt the Qur'an and Hadith from different teachers and scholars. The amount of varying oral transmissions and the amount of people who have learnt them, and the fact there are no discrepancies in what they have memorised, is not a historical accident. The conclusion can only be that the Qur'an and Hadith memorised today are the same ones that were taught over 1,400 years ago. There is no other rational explanation for this unique oral phenomenon, unless someone argues that all of these memorisers throughout the ages – at different points in time and different places in the world – somehow came together to ensure that they all memorised

and recited the exact same Qur'an and Hadith. To pose such an argument, however, is conspiratorial and absurd.

For the sake of argument, let's say that this unique oral tradition of memorisation does not exist in Islam, and let's also say that we do not possess any chains of transmission so we cannot reliably trace the predictions directly back to Muhammad himself. This makes absolutely no difference, because we have written records of these predictions dating back hundreds of years, and in many cases, over a thousand years, before the events they foretell actually took place. So, it in no way diminishes the phenomenon of the accuracy of the predictions. In fact, we have surviving written copies of Hadith collections dating back to as early the first century of Islam. Some of the collections are so early that they were written by people who personally knew the companions of Muhammad and were their students [173]. Now, if people who lack insight into the future really were inventing predictions in the name of Muhammad, then what should we expect to find in the accuracy of these predictions? There would undoubtedly be many failed prophecies, just like we saw with Nostradamus, Joseph Smith, Charles Taze Russell, and others. This is just the norm in history. But this is not what we find with the predictions in the Qur'an and Hadith, they are all highly accurate and crucially, without failure. If you still really think that these kinds of predictions are something that can easily be fabricated, then why not perform a simple experiment. Write down ten detailed predictions in different areas for the coming year. For example, it could be the winning team of this season's sporting competition such as football or basketball. It could be the next natural disaster that will strike humanity, such as an earthquake. It could also be something unexpected politically such as a scandal or assassination. Do this for ten different areas, and provide the same level of detail as we have seen in the Qur'an and Hadith (i.e. identify specific people, places, events). You will find that most predictions with any kind of detail actually end up failing to be accurate. This is even with the advent of modern technology like the internet, which means we have the advantage of being much better

informed about what's going on in the world than those of the past could ever have dreamed of.

Finally, this flawless preservation of the Islamic source texts is, in fact, the fulfilment of a promise within the Qur'an itself. We find that the author of the Qur'an makes a bold claim about its preservation: "We have sent down the Qur'an Ourselves, and We Ourselves will guard it" [15:9]. How could the author of the Qur'an have guaranteed that it would be perfectly preserved to this very day, especially considering the many social and political changes that the Muslim world has undergone in over 1,400 years since the Qur'an was first revealed? Examples of such change include disputes over the succession of leadership of the Muslim world after the death of Muhammad, the incorporation of many foreign words into the Arabic language as a result of Islam spreading into foreign lands and mixing with new cultures and languages, and the sudden influx of non-Arabs into the religion, many of whom did not speak Arabic. The track record of all other revealed scriptures throughout history proves that the opposite is the case: when faced with similar social and political changes to those which the Qur'an has endured, intervention with, or loss of, the text was the normal consequence. The flawless preservation of the Qur'an is the unique exception to this rule.

Islam's Rejection of Superstition and Other Falsehoods

Muhammad's extraordinary insight into the world of the unseen was not just restricted to making accurate predictions about the future, but it also included the rejection of false superstitious beliefs and practices which were prevalent in his time. Earlier in the book we covered a number of modern day false superstitious beliefs and practices such as astrology and numerology. The seventh century Arabs at the time of Muhammad were no different, in fact superstition formed a large part of how society ran.

Some of these included belief in omens, astrology, seeking blessing from objects, and soothsaying. All were rejected by Muhammad who advocated for people to follow truth and not myths and false superstitions:

Those who follow the Messenger [Muhammad]... who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong and makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits for them the evil and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them...

[Qur'an, 7:157]

History has recorded a large number of myths and superstitions pertaining to the Arabs. Astrology was one of the most popular forms. There is a notable incident recorded that on the same day that the infant son of Muhammad died, there was an eclipse of the Sun and Moon. The people linked the two events together by saying that even the Sun and Moon were saddened by the death of his child. Muhammad personally denounced such beliefs, saying: "The Sun and the Moon do not eclipse because of the death or life (i.e. birth) of someone..." [174]. Is there really any reason Muhammad would go against the superstitions of his people, especially when he came from a tribal culture that blindly followed the traditions of their forefathers? Had Muhammad been an imposter, then this would have been the perfect opportunity to take advantage of the ignorance of the people, but he did not. The Qur'an also records some of the superstitions of the Arabs relating to the Sun and the Moon, which they used to worship: "The night, the day, the Sun, the Moon, are only a few of His signs. Do not bow down in worship to the Sun or the Moon, but bow down to God who created them, if it is truly Him that you worship" [41:37].

The pre-Islamic Arabs also widely believed in the concept of good and bad omens. For example, they believed that certain months of the year (such as the month of Safar) brought bad luck [175], and that certain birds were bad omens. When someone died and was buried, a night bird (known as 'Haamah' in Arabic) was said to hover over the grave of a murdered person whose blood had not been avenged [176]. Muhammad

denounced both of these beliefs when he said: "There is no bad omen (from birds), nor is there any Haamah, nor is there any bad omen in the month of Safar" [177].

When it comes to disease and medicine we know that magic and superstition played a very large part in the life of the Arabs [178]. For example, once there was an epidemic of fever in the Arabian oasis of Khaybar, people visiting the place would bray at the gates like donkeys to protect themselves. The reason was that they believed the fever attacked only humans. By imitating donkeys they hoped to avoid catching it. In another example, a man could repel an attack of insanity by befouling himself with menstrual cloths and surrounding himself with dead men's bones. An illness could be expelled by transference to someone else. For example, in a fever, a thread was tied round the arm of the patient. Whoever undid the thread would have the fever transferred to him, and the patient would recover. If someone was bitten by a snake, it was believed he could be cured if he held pieces of women's jewellery in his hand and rattled them all night [179]. The advent of Islam did away with all of this. There is an incident where a Bedouin approached Muhammad and asked, "O Messenger of God, should we not treat sickness?" Muhammad replied, "Treat sickness, for God has not created any disease except He has also created the cure, except for one disease." The Bedouin asked, "O Messenger of God, what is it?" Muhammad responded, "Old age" [180]. When it came to contagious diseases, Islam was way ahead of its time as it instituted practices such as isolation and quarantine. Today these are strategies which are implemented by public health authorities. Muhammad said: "If you hear of an outbreak of plague in a land, do not enter it; but if the plague breaks out in a place while you are in it, do not leave that place" [181]. In fact, entire books have been written on the medicine of Muhammad, such as *The Prophetic Medicine* by the classical scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.

Let's compare such seventh century teachings of Muhammad on disease, medicine, and quarantine control, to the situation in Europe where, as late as the fourteenth century, it was still widely believed that distant planets caused diseases here on earth. The Bubonic Plague, also known

as the Black Death, was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 75 to 200 million people in Eurasia and peaking in Europe in the years 1346 – 1353 CE. It spread so quickly through Europe because medical knowledge had stagnated during the Middle Ages [182]. The most authoritative European account at the time of the Black Death came from a medical faculty in Paris. They produced a report in 1345 CE that was sent to the king of France, placing the primary source of the disease on a conjunction of three planets that caused a “great pestilence in the air”:

We say that the distant and first cause of this pestilence was and is the configuration of the heavens. In 1345, at one hour after noon on 20 March, there was a major conjunction of three planets in Aquarius. This conjunction, along with other earlier conjunctions and eclipses, by causing a deadly corruption of the air around us, signifies mortality and famine, and also other things about which we will not speak here because they are not relevant... These effects were intensified because Mars – a malevolent planet, breeding anger and wars – was in the sign of Leo from 6 October 1347 until the end of May this year... [183]

When we look to the writings of Europe’s distant past, we find similar accounts. The *Iliad*, an ancient Greek epic poem believed to be written c. 1194–1184 BCE, also attributes illness to stars:

Priam was the first to see him sparkling on the plain, bright as that star in autumn rising, whose unclouded rays shine out amid a throng of stars at dusk-the one they call Orion’s dog, most brilliant, yes, but baleful as a sign: it brings great fever to frail men. [184]

It seems like fourteenth century European medicine had advanced very little and was still steeped in the superstition of the ancient Greeks over 2,000 years before them. Sadly, a much more sinister explanation for the Black Death was prevalent in other parts of Europe. Here a chronicle by a fourteenth century Franciscan friar reports that Jewish people were blamed for the cause of the disease:

In 1347 there was such a great pestilence and mortality throughout almost the whole world that in the opinion of well-informed men scarcely a tenth of mankind survived. The victims did not linger long, but died on the second or third day. The plague raged so fiercely that many cities and towns were entirely emptied of people... Some say that it was brought about by the corruption of the air; others that the Jews planned to wipe out all the Christians with poison and had poisoned wells and springs everywhere. And many Jews confessed as much under torture: that they had bred spiders and toads in pots and pans, and had obtained poison from overseas... God, the lord of vengeance, has not suffered the malice of the Jews to go unpunished. Throughout Germany, in all but a few places, they were burnt. For fear of that punishment many accepted baptism and their lives were spared. This action was taken against the Jews in 1349, and it still continues unabated, for in a number of regions many people, noble and humble alike, have laid plans against them and their defenders which they will never abandon until the whole Jewish race has been destroyed. [185]

We can see that even as late as the fourteenth century, Europe was still attributing the causes of disease to astrology as well as conspiracy theories about minorities. Compare all this to the teachings of Muhammad on disease, its cures, and quarantine control over 600 years prior.

Another area where mankind has suffered due to superstition is the criminal justice system. The seventh century Arabs lived by the tribal law of retaliation. According to this custom, when a noble person of a strong and influential tribe was killed, it was not enough to kill the perpetrator, especially if they had not been of equal rank. Therefore, many innocent members of the other tribe used to be killed. If such revenge was not sought then it was believed that the victim's tribe would be shamed, and the adult males of the tribe would have to abandon wine, perfume, and fancy food until they avenged their tribe [186]. To appreciate the extent to which the Arabs could take this practice, there is a famous incident where one tribe killed a camel belonging to another and it led to the start

of a terrible war which lasted for 40 years, killing scores of people from both sides [187].

Muhammad condemned such systems of justice as immoral. Collective punishment gave way to individual responsibility, as the Qur'an declares that innocent people are not to be held accountable for the actions of others: "And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another" [35:18]. When it comes to punishing a person who is said to be guilty of a crime, the accused is presumed to be innocent until concrete evidence is brought forward. Muhammad declared: "Had men been believed only according to their allegations, some persons would have claimed the blood and properties belonging to others, but the accuser is bound to present positive proof" [188]. One example of such evidence is multiple, corroborating eyewitness testimony, and each witness must be a reliable individual whose word can be trusted. The testimony of known liars, for example, would be rejected. We can see that Islam did not come with spirituality alone, but it also brought with it very practical approaches to solving our problems and challenges in day to day life.

You may be thinking to yourself, is this really so impressive, as this is just the norm in criminal justice systems around the world. Today we take things like presumption of innocence, trials, testimony, and evidence for granted. But such legal systems are quite different to the ones that were practised up until only a few centuries ago. Throughout Medieval Europe, justice was heavily influenced by superstition. The most important figure in a court of law was not a judge or jury, in fact they were not human at all. When a person was accused of a crime, they would have to perform a ritual during which God would reveal the guilt or innocence of the accused. People from poorer backgrounds would undergo a trial by ordeal [189]. For example, the accused might have to hold a red-hot iron. The wound would be bandaged and re-examined three days later by a priest, who would pronounce that God had intervened to heal it, in which case they were seen as innocent, or that it was merely festering—in which case the accused would be

condemned as guilty. Nobles and people from a rich background would undergo a trial by combat. If a man was accused of a serious crime, he could prove his innocence by fighting his accuser. Fights took place in front of a huge crowd and had the atmosphere of a country fair. The battle would last until one of the men surrendered or was killed. It was still considered divine justice, as God would ensure that the innocent party would always prevail [190]. Eventually, trials by ordeal and combat gave way to trials by jury, but such superstitious justice systems were in place in Europe throughout the Middle Ages; over a thousand years after Islam rejected superstitious trials and introduced an evidence-based system.

Even racism, one of the great evils of history, has its roots in superstition. The Curse of Ham (also known as Noah's Curse) refers to an incident in the Bible, in the book of Genesis, regarding Noah and his son Ham. In this story, Noah gets angry with Ham, and places a curse on his descendants (the Canaanites), condemning them to slavery. There is a racist interpretation of this curse that some in the West have taken in order to justify slavery. The explanation that black Africans, as the "sons of Ham", were cursed, possibly "blackened" by their sins, was advanced during the Middle Ages and became increasingly common during the slave trade of the 18th and 19th centuries [191]. Even the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who is considered a shining example of enlightened thinking, considered some human beings to be inherently inferior to others from the moment of their birth: "For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule." Then he concludes, "some men are by nature free, and others slave, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right" [192]. Even Mahatma Gandhi, one of the most revered spiritual leaders of the twentieth century, expressed racist views. Gandhi spent 21 years living in Colonial South Africa, from 1893 to 1914. He arrived there during a time when the nation was suffering severe political unrest and racial discrimination against black people. In 1895, Gandhi began actively promoting racial segregation in Durban. The Durban post office had two doors: one for whites and the other shared by

Indians and black Africans. Being Indian, Gandhi was required to share a door with black South Africans, which deeply offended him. He petitioned the authorities to create separate entrances for Indians and was granted his wish when the authorities provided three separate entrances, one each for black Africans, Indians, and Europeans [193]. In 1903 Gandhi wrote: "We believe also that the white race in South Africa should be the predominating race." [194]. Gandhi shared many of the discriminatory racial views of his time. He was perhaps a product of the rigid Hindu caste system which divides people into different categories, with anyone falling outside of these categories being classified as "untouchables" and treated as social outcasts.

The Arabs of the seventh century were no better; they wrongly believed that the most superior of people were those who descended from the Arab race and had Arab blood. This is reflected in the widespread and brutal treatment of slaves before the advent of Islam. Racism is an idea that Islam completely rejects:

O mankind, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware. [49:13]

Here the Qur'an speaks of human equality in no uncertain terms. Islam rejects the notion that certain individuals or nations are favoured because of their wealth, power, or race. God created human beings as equals who are to be distinguished from each other only on the basis of their faith and piety. The life of Muhammad is a beautiful realisation of this Qur'anic standard. Throughout his prophethood, Muhammad advised his people to set aside their ignorant and perverse values and to live by the Qur'an. Muhammad's love for humanity, irrespective of race or nationality, is demonstrated in his famous Last Sermon. In perhaps the most noteworthy manifestation of anti-racism of any religious figurehead in recorded history, he challenged an ultra-nationalistic and highly racist society by calling on people to unite under a banner of humanity:

O People, lend me an attentive ear, for I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and take these words to those who could not be present here today... All of mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black, nor does a black have any superiority over a white, except by piety and good action. [195]

Muhammad's anti-racist mentality helped lead his people out of the darkness of nationalism and racism and into the light by guiding them onto the path of racial equality. The fact that Islam spread amongst all the colours and races of the world is testimony to the fact that Islam did not accept these false divisions. Today millions of people across the world, black, white, Asian, African, and European are all part of the unique Islamic brotherhood and sisterhood.

Muhammad's anti-racist views were apparent very early on in his Prophetic mission through his friendship with Bilal ibn Rabah, a black slave who rose to a leading position within the Muslim community of seventh century Arabia. He was appointed by Muhammad to make the public call to prayer. In choosing Bilal for this honourable role, Muhammad demonstrated that social exclusion and subordination based upon skin colour was not to be permitted in an Islamic society. Muhammad broke down racial barriers for black believers in a part of the world that had one of the poorest track records for human rights, preceding the Western civil rights movement and Martin Luther King by over 1,400 years. It's no wonder that British historian Professor Arnold J. Toynbee wrote, "The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue" [196].

If Muhammad's main motivation was to gain power, as some argue, then why did he go against racism? He had absolutely nothing to gain by up-

lifting the status and rights of slaves in tribal Arabia. Quite the opposite in fact, as his stance only served to alienate and create enemies of those who were in positions of power over slaves and had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Muhammad spoke out against racism, and every evil in tribal Arabia, because the Qur'an commands believers to uphold justice, even if it goes against one's self-interests: "You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly— if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do" [4:135].

In conclusion, we've seen how Muhammad rejected the superstitions that were present in virtually every level of seventh century Arabian society. We should not be surprised by their widespread popularity. Just think about the level of knowledge about the natural world at the time of Muhammad, over 1,400 years ago. Mankind lacked the technology we have today and so came to many incorrect conclusions about how the natural world works. Legends and myths were invented because they lacked a means of scientifically explaining the world around them. Of course, some thinkers and philosophers at that time still managed to make some amazing discoveries, such as accurately estimating the circumference of the earth, but for everything they got right, they also got a lot wrong. Lack of education is another issue; we take for granted the ability to read and write but most people in the world at that time lacked these skills. Arabia itself had extremely high rates of illiteracy. It is estimated that the number of literate people in Muhammad's city of birth, Mecca, did not exceed seventeen [197]. Taking into account all of these circumstances, it would have been very difficult to identify the falsehood of such beliefs and practices. Muhammad was born and raised in a world that was filled with baseless superstitions, he was subject to the same technological limitations as everyone else, and he could neither read nor write [198]. Yet he was unique, in the sense that he saw through all the falsehood that those around him were indulging in.

The Prophet of God

In this chapter we've analysed the different insights that Muhammad was inspired with. We've seen that he not only enlightened mankind about the false superstitious beliefs and practices of his time, but he also accurately predicted numerous future events. The fact that Muhammad's close companions memorised and transmitted such prophecies, some of which must have seemed like impossible fantasies for people living in the seventh century, shows their loyalty and the level of trust they had in his character. Muhammad accurately foretold many things, and was given a book of revelation, the Qur'an, which accurately foretold many more things. Yet we've only scratched the surface, the Qur'an and Hadith are filled with such prophecies about the future which have either been fulfilled, or are unfolding before our eyes today.

Just what was the source of Muhammad's extraordinary insight into the future? There are four possibilities:

1. It was the result of guesswork
2. He was dependent on other people
3. It was the result of his own skill
4. He received it from a higher power

Let us now consider each of these possibilities.

His accuracy into the future cannot be the result of lucky guesses. When one guesses, one does so blindly. If Muhammad really was just guessing then we would expect to find a mixture of results, with some correct guesses but also some wrong ones. But this is not the case with Muhammad, as we've seen that his predictions were flawless. Purely from probability, it is impossible to accurately guess the events he did, which

spanned multiple nations and different time periods, many of which were outside of the sphere of influence of Muslims, without making a single mistake. So we can rule out lucky guesses as it's not a plausible explanation. Perhaps he was dependent on other people, consulting them for information about the future? His prophecies were actually made in the context of conversations with people and were commonly in response to unexpected questions and challenges that he would be confronted with, both from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. His response, in the form of a prophecy, would be given immediately, without him seeking help from others. Moreover, if he really was seeking help from others then this phenomenon of accurate predictions would not be unique to Muhammad. There would be other famous people recorded in history who have displayed a similar quality of predictions, such as his alleged teachers and any individuals who had access to the same sources that Muhammad relied upon, but this is not the case. We can conclude that he was not dependent on other people for his insight. Let's now think about whether it was the result of his own skill. When we consider that Muhammad was a human being with human limitations then this must also be eliminated as a possibility. If Muhammad, as a mere human being, relied on his own skills, then surely other human beings in history, those possessing intellect equal to or greater than his own, should have been able to mimic the accuracy of his predictions. Earlier in this book we spent a lot of time analysing many of the most popular prophets in history such as Nostradamus, Joseph Smith, and others who all claimed that they had a special insight into the future. Without fail, every single one of them has fallen short when their claims have been scrutinised. So how can we explain this phenomenon that we find with Muhammad's accurate insight into the future? When we take all of his teachings into account, it should leave us in no doubt that he was inspired by something that is far more knowledgeable and powerful than human beings. The Qur'an affirms this when it reveals where Muhammad got his knowledge from: "Your Companion is neither astray nor being misled. Nor does he say [anything] of [his own] desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him. He was taught by one mighty in Power" [53:2-5]. The Qur'an reveals that Muhammad was inspired by God Himself, who has knowledge of all

things. The Qur'an further tells us that only God's knowledge is perfect and free of error: "And if it were from any other than God, they would have found in it many a discrepancy" [4:82]. This is one reason why Muslims have no doubt about the existence of God, because only He could have inspired Muhammad with such flawless insight into the future.

One final contention that will be addressed is the claim that the accurate predictions of Muhammad are best explained by him seeking help from an occult or evil force such as the devil. This is highly unlikely for a number of reasons. Firstly, if he really was helped by the devil then this phenomenon of accurate predictions would not be unique to Muhammad. There have been many people involved in the occult, such as Nostradamus, who made predictions about the future. Such individuals would also have access to the same devil and yet none of them have displayed a similar quality of predictions as Muhammad. Secondly, a content analysis of the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad would strongly indicate that these sources are not an evil force like the devil because the teachings of Islam promote morals and ethics that are not in line with an evil worldview. Islam commands believers to perform righteous deeds such as giving charity to the poor, helping those in need such as widows and orphans, and standing up for justice against oppression. The Qur'an even makes it clear that the devil is our staunch enemy: "O mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and wholesome in the earth, and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Lo! he is an open enemy for you" [2:168]. If the devil authored or inspired the Qur'an, then why would the devil curse himself in the Qur'an where believers are encouraged to recite the following: "I seek refuge in God from Satan the accursed." [16:98]. Thirdly, the Qur'an could not have come from the devil because the basis of his existence is the Qur'an and revelation itself. His existence is based upon revelation and not empirical evidence such as observation or experiment. Therefore, if someone claims that the source of the Qur'an is the devil, they would have to prove his existence and ultimately have to prove revelation. In the case of using the Qur'an as the revelation to establish the devil's existence, then that would already establish it as a Divine text, because to believe in the devil's existence would presuppose the Qur'an

to be Divine, and therefore this contention is self-defeating. Finally, this devil objection does not conform to our intellectual practices because we can realistically explain away anything by citing the activity of the devil. To say that the Qur'an could have been produced by some unknown force of unknown motives would be tantamount to invoking the existence of any unknown entity to explain anything, it is an intellectual cop-out. Furthermore, everything can be reduced to absurdity by attributing it to the devil, so from this perspective it is also a self-defeating scepticism as it means that nothing can be true.

Even the name 'Muhammad' has prophetic implications. It's an Arabic word that means 'the praised one'. The Qur'an states that Muhammad's remembrance will be raised: "We elevated your mention for you" [94:4]. Since this verse was revealed over 1,400 years ago, the truth is that Muhammad has been, and continues to be, the most praised person in history. Not a second goes by without a minaret somewhere in the world publicly proclaiming the time for prayer and saying, "I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God". Every time his name is mentioned, Muslims say with great reverence and love "peace and blessings be upon him". There is no other human being in history that has been praised in this way constantly, every second of every day and every night, without stoppage, for over 1,400 years. Moreover, instead of his mentioning going down over time, which is what we find in most cases with people who become famous, it actually increases over time, as the Muslim population grows. The name 'Muhammad' is regularly the most popular baby's name in the world [199]. This is despite the fact that Muhammad never encouraged Muslims to adopt his name, in fact he said that the best names are Abdullah and Abdur-Rahman (which mean "servant of God" and "servant of the Most Merciful" respectively) [200]. Muhammad is also the most followed person in the world. This is not a following that is superficial, as Muslims around the world eat, drink, sleep, wash, dress, walk, talk, pray, fast, and give charity exactly like he did.

Let us consider the psychological aspect of this for a moment. As human beings, our great achievements rarely remain private. Muhammad achieved

things that no other human being will ever achieve; we've seen that his accurate predictions are just the tip of the iceberg. It is human nature to publicise oneself in order to gain admiration and recognition from other people, and yet he remained humble throughout his life, never once showing off or bragging. In fact, people who heard about him would journey to meet him and not even be able to identify him in a crowd [201]. All of his great achievements he attributed to God, Muhammad never claimed to have all knowledge or knowledge of the future. The Qur'an attributes his prophecies to God Almighty who inspired him: "That is from the news of the unseen which We reveal to you, [O Muhammad]. You knew it not, neither you nor your people before this" [11:49].

It's important to note that in Islam, a prophet is much more than someone who just prophesies. Not only are they inspired by God with special insights, but they are also given the divine mission of conveying a message of guidance to their people, as well as acting as the best of role models for people to follow. From this perspective, Muhammad's life and personality must also stand up to scrutiny. We have an abundance of detailed accounts of the life of Muhammad, perhaps more so than any other human being in history. This includes the smallest of details such as the position in which he slept [202], the direction in which he combed his hair [203] and how he used to smile so much that you could see his pre-molar teeth [204]. His companions went so far in their desire to describe everything of Muhammad that they even counted the number of grey hairs on his head and beard (fourteen, in case you're curious [205]!). All of the details that they recorded fill volumes. Even in our modern age with technology like video recordings, we do not have such intimate knowledge of the most famous people in the world. For Muslims, such information is invaluable, as we believe Muhammad to be the best of mankind and role models, and it therefore allows us to emulate him in all aspects of our lives. It's important to point out that Muhammad's companions even narrated incidents about him which would generally be considered embarrassing, such as the occasion when he fell off his riding horse and dislocated his foot [206]. If his companions were lying about him or trying to concoct a prophetic aura around him then they would have hidden such information.

But they never did, they narrated exactly what they heard and saw from Muhammad, which shows us that they wanted to convey every possible piece of information about him. It also indicates that they had sincere faith in him as a genuine Prophet of God.

We've seen how detailed the records are about Muhammad, but how early are they? Amazingly, we have written records which can be dated back to people who were alive during his lifetime. You may be thinking, why is this so impressive, surely the same applies to all major figures of ancient history. This is actually not the case, as many are unaware that the ancient historical figures they take for granted have very little early evidence for their existence. We have nothing written about religious figures such as Moses or Jesus, which can be dated back to their own lifetime, nor do we have any such material regarding major philosophical figures. Much of Western philosophy finds its basis in the thoughts and teachings of giants such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; they are referred to as 'the Big Three' ancient Greek philosophers, and yet we have no early records for their existence. Let's look at the example of Socrates (469–399 BCE). He is so influential that he is credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy. Yet he remains, as he was in his lifetime, an enigma, with almost all our information about him being disputed. The task of identifying the historical Socrates is so difficult that the whole contested issue is generally referred to as the "Socratic problem". Each age, each intellectual turn, produces a Socrates of its own [207]. The Socratic problem arises from the fact that the various people who wrote about him produced accounts which conflict with each other at their most basic level [208]. Another issue with such sources is their late dating. The earliest surviving source about Socrates is Aristophanes' comedy, *Clouds*. This play was originally produced in 423 BCE [209]. No copies of any such production have materially survived from classical Athens, we have to rely almost entirely on a manuscript tradition that begins only in the Middle Ages [210]. That's a gap of nearly a thousand years.

Those are just some of the problems with the early sources for philosophical figures like Socrates, and indeed this is the norm in ancient history.

Muhammad, by comparison, is better attested to than most figures of ancient history. As well as Muslim sources, we also have multiple written records about him from independent, non-Muslim sources that lived during his time. For example, what follows is a short seventh century Nestorian chronicle known as the Khuzistan Chronicle. It gives a brief account of the Muslim invasions of Persia and mentions that they were under the leadership of Muhammad:

Then God raised up against them the sons of Ishmael, [numerous] as the sand on the sea shore, whose leader was Muhammad. Neither walls nor gates, armour or shield, withstood them, and they gained control over the entire land of the Persians. [211]

The *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati* is a seventh century work by a Christian. In this dialogue between a Christian and some Jews, the author reveals the appearance of a new Prophet among the Saracens (Arabs):

When the candidatus was killed by the Saracens, I was at Caesarea and I set off by boat to Sykamina. People were saying “the candidatus has been killed,” and we Jews were overjoyed. And they were saying that the prophet had appeared, coming with the Saracens, and that he was proclaiming the advent of the anointed one, the Christ who was to come. [212]

One of the most interesting accounts of the seventh century comes from Sebeos who was a bishop of the House of Bagratunis. Sebeos is the first non-Muslim author to present us with a theory for the rise of Islam that pays attention to what the Muslims themselves thought they were doing [213]. As for Muhammad, he has the following to say:

At that time a certain man from among those same sons of Ismael, whose name was Mahmet [Muhammad], a merchant, as if by God’s command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learnt and informed in the history of Moses. Now because the

command was from on high, at a single order they all came together in unity of religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham. So, Mahmet legislated for them: not to eat carrion, not to drink wine, not to speak falsely, and not to engage in fornication. He said: 'With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him for ever. And he brought about as he promised during that time while he loved Ismael. But now you are the sons of Abraham and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham, and go and seize the land which God gave to your father Abraham. No one will be able to resist you in battle, because God is with you.' [214]

We can see that Sebeos knows plenty of personal information about Muhammad. For example, he is aware that Muhammad was a merchant by profession before his prophethood. He hints that his life was suddenly changed by a divinely inspired revelation. He presents a good summary of Muhammad's preaching, i.e. belief in one God and Abraham as a common ancestor of Jews and Arabs. He even picks out some of the prohibitions which are mentioned in the Qur'an, such as false speech and the drinking of alcohol. All this information that Sebeos presents accurately conforms to the Muslim traditions. Many take such detailed, early, and accurate accounts about Muhammad for granted, but it's actually quite rare with figures from ancient history. What we can conclude is that there is no doubt about the existence and mission of Muhammad, which multiple early and independent sources confirm.

We will now turn to the detailed Muslim traditions about his life and personality. Throughout his life, long before his prophethood, Muhammad had a reputation for being honest, so much so that he earned the titles of "The Trustworthy" and "The Truthful". His family, friends, neighbours, and business acquaintances knew that he was the most honest and truthful person among them. This is demonstrated in an incident that took place before he publicly announced his prophethood. One day Muhammad climbed to the top of a hill and called out to all the tribes of his city.

They quickly gathered around him and he asked them, “O Quraish! If I say that an army is advancing on you from behind the mountains, will you believe me?” All said in one voice, “Yes; because we have never heard you telling a lie” [215]. All the people of his city, without any exception, bore witness to his lifelong truthfulness and honesty, for he had lived a pure and pious life among them for 40 years.

Even after publicly announcing his prophethood at the age of 40, when many of his people turned against him and the message of the Qur’an, he still retained a reputation of being trustworthy and truthful. Such was their trust in his noble character that even though they had turned into his enemies, opposed the Qur’an and persecuted him and his companions, they still entrusted him with their valuables for safekeeping! There is an incident that took place when Muhammad had to flee his home by nightfall, because of a plot by his enemies to murder him whilst he slept. Whilst he was making plans to escape, he still had in his possession the valuables belonging to the people plotting to murder him. Since he was leaving behind his house and furniture, to take their valuables in place of his own would have been seen as the smallest of compensations. But such was his honest character that before his departure, Muhammad asked his cousin, Ali, to stay behind to ensure every article in his house was given back to its rightful owner. Muhammad’s wife reported:

He [Muhammad] instructed Ali to stay behind in Mecca, in order to return all the trusts the Messenger of God had for people. There was nobody in Mecca who had valuables that he feared for except that he kept them with the Messenger of God, due to the honesty and trustworthiness that was known [to all] about him. Thus, Ali stayed back for three days and three nights to deliver everything entrusted by the people to the Messenger of God, and then caught up with him after completing that task. [216]

Liars and conmen typically display certain behaviour and share a common psychological profile: they have a reputation for lying that starts out with small lies which gradually get bigger and bigger. Does it make

sense that Muhammad, a person who had never told a lie, neither big nor small, during his entire life would start lying at the age of 40 by inventing the biggest lie of all, that he had been chosen by God to be His prophet and receive the Qur'an? How could Muhammad tell lies about God, when he did not tell lies about human beings? His conduct shows his steadfast honesty even in the most difficult times! Montgomery Watt, the late Emeritus Professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies, explores this in his book *Muhammad at Mecca*:

His readiness to undergo persecution for his beliefs, the high moral character of the men who believed in him and looked up to him as a leader, and the greatness of his ultimate achievement – all argue his fundamental integrity. To suppose Muhammad an impostor raises more problems than it solves. [217]

If one was to ask why a person would make a false claim to prophethood, their answer might be fame, glory, wealth, and status. When you think of kings and leaders, what images come to your mind? Status and power is usually associated with exquisite food, fancy clothing, and monumental palaces. When it comes to Muhammad however, such a picture could not be further from the truth. Throughout his 23 years of prophethood, Muhammad led a very simple and humble lifestyle. Sahl ibn Sa'ad, one of Muhammad's companions, said with regards to his diet, "The Prophet of God did not see bread made from fine flour from the time God sent him (as a prophet) until he died" [218]. He did not like to be wasteful; there was never any surplus bread in his house [219]. He emphasised the feeding of the poor and one's neighbours, even saying that "He is not a believer whose stomach is filled while his neighbour goes hungry" [220].

Muhammad would never complain about the food that was brought to him, and he accepted and attended invitations where bread made of barley and rancid fat a few days old was served [221]. His living quarters were similarly modest. There is a narration by his companion Umar ibn Al-Khattab which gives a description of what he saw when he went to visit Muhammad in his living quarters. Umar saw that Muhammad was

lying on a mat which was made out of the leaves of the date-palm tree, his head was placed on a leather pillow stuffed with the bark of the date-palm tree. When Muhammad got up to greet him, Umar saw that the tough texture of his bedding had left marks on his sides. This moved Umar to tears, upon which Muhammad asked him what makes him weep. Umar stated that the kings of Rome and Persia lived in luxury and that since he is the prophet of God he deserves better. Muhammad responded by saying that they should be happy that others may have this worldly life but that they have the afterlife [222].

Muhammad taught: “The best of you is the one who is best to his family, and I am the best of you to my family” [223]. Despite Muhammad’s responsibilities as a prophet, teacher, statesman, and judge, he still used to milk his goat [224], mend his clothes, repair his shoes, and help his family with the household work [225]. Some people are forced to live simple and humble lifestyles because they have no other choice due to their circumstances. Muhammad lived this simple life until he died, in spite of the fact that the Muslim treasury was at his disposal and the greater part of the Arabian Peninsula was Muslim before he died. He had very few material possessions and he did not make any arrangements for special treatment for his own family upon his death. When he died he left very little wealth behind, and what he did have was given to charity:

Amr Ibn Al-Hareth, one of Muhammad’s companions, said that when the Prophet died, he left neither money nor anything else except his white riding mule, his arms, and a piece of land which he left to charity. [226]

Muhammad’s life and death are what we would expect for someone who was not motivated by materialism but rather had his sight firmly set on the hereafter. You may be thinking that Muhammad endured such harsh living conditions in order to achieve an end goal of power and domination over Arabia. This cannot be the case, as early on in his mission when the Muslims were in a position of weakness, those who opposed him of-

ferred him power and kingship in order to try and persuade him to stop preaching against their worship of idols:

If you desire money and wealth by preaching what you are preaching, we will collect enough for you from our own. We will make you the wealthiest of all of us. If it is chieftainship that you desire, we are ready to make you our paramount chief, so that we will never decide on a matter without you. If you desire rulership, we will make you our ruler... [227]

Muhammad responded by saying: “Even if they place the sun in my right-hand, and the moon in my left-hand in return for giving up this matter, I will never stop, until either God makes it triumph or I die defending it” [228]. He rejected all such offers. What this demonstrates is that Muhammad was not motivated by money or power, but rather he was sincere about the message he was preaching.

There are certain characteristics that one would expect a prophet of God to possess. If they are intended to guide the masses, then they need a great deal of patience. A harsh and intolerant personality will make people flee from them. Prophets need to be honest and have the trust of the people long before their prophethood, otherwise people will rightly have reason to doubt the truthfulness of their claims of divine inspiration. They should lead simple lives and not be caught up in material things, otherwise people may question their motivations. They must also be steadfast, as many challenges will come their way, which is to be expected when a person stands up and challenges the corrupt and powerful institutions in any society. It’s simply impossible to do justice to Muhammad’s life and personality in a short book, but the more one studies him, the more one will fall in love with and appreciate who Muhammad really was. Significantly, scrutinising his character in the context of the many difficult situations and circumstances that he faced will facilitate the conclusion that he had unparalleled levels of truthfulness, humility, and steadfastness—key signs of a prophetic character.

CHAPTER 3

Ancient Predictions About Muhammad

Islam teaches that Muhammad is the last prophet in a long line of prophets that have been sent by God to mankind throughout history. Examples of other prophets include Abraham, Moses and Jesus, may God's peace be upon them all. All of the prophets sent by God have conveyed the same message: worship the Creator alone, not the creation. Although this message is simple, it has been persistently corrupted and distorted, so over time other prophets have been sent as reminders. Universally, the prophets have been given knowledge of the future as evidence of their rank and status. Of course, con-artists and false prophets will try to imitate this knowledge in order to be able to pass themselves off as genuine. In this book, we've seen that some have managed to deceive millions of people using different means such as highly ambiguous predictions and sophisticated psychological tricks.

Another way that God helps mankind to distinguish truth from falsehood is the references that the prophets made to one another. Their prophecies

not only foretold important world-changing events, but they also acted as signposts for the prophets who would come after them. This way, their people would be informed about the signs of the future prophets, so that they would know what to look out for, recognise, and follow them when they finally arrive. By laying out very specific characteristics for the prophets to come, it would help people to identify false prophets who may claim prophethood. If Muhammad really is the final prophet and the only prophet sent to the whole of mankind, then that would make his arrival an event of cosmic significance for humanity. So, we would expect to find mention of him in the remnants of the former divinely inspired scriptures. The Qur'an proclaims exactly this:

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom
they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel...
[7:157]

We can see that according to the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. This is exactly what we find when we examine today's Bible. There are ancient prophecies which foretold Muhammad's coming thousands of years before he was even born. It's important to note that the present day scriptures of the Jews and Christians are not the same as the ones which were originally revealed by God to prophets such as Moses and Jesus. This is the conclusion of Bible Scholars themselves, one reason being the existence of many different versions of these scriptures [229]. Even if the Bibles that we possess today have undergone changes through history, a careful study shows that they contain some ancient prophecies which have been faithfully preserved, and we will see these prophecies can only be explained by the Prophet Muhammad's existence. You may be surprised to know that there is a good chance you have been reading these very prophecies in the Bible without even realising it. For many, Prophet Muhammad has been 'hidden in plain sight' as there are those with vested interests who don't want the world to know the truth about him. Our discussion is going to focus primarily on the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy 33 and Isaiah 42. We will see that there are some compelling prophecies

that foretell the coming of an Arabian Prophet, and why Muhammad is the only individual in history who fulfils them.

The Arabian Prophecy in Deuteronomy 33

The book of Deuteronomy mentions a prophecy given by the Prophet Moses, foretelling the emergence of multitudes of saints and a “fiery law” from Arabia:

And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death: ‘The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints; from his right hand went a fiery law for them.’ [Deuteronomy 33:1-2]

At first glance this may appear to be describing events that have already happened in the past, as the above English translation uses verbs in the past tense. It’s important to understand that biblical prophecies are commonly spoken in the past tense, a literary technique that is known as the prophetic perfect tense. It is used to describe future events that are so certain to happen that they are referred to in the past tense as if they have already happened [230]. Rabbi Isaac ben Yedaiah describes it as:

[The rabbis] of blessed memory followed, in these words of theirs, in the paths of the prophets who speak of something which will happen in the future in the language of the past. Since they saw in prophetic vision that which was to occur in the future, they spoke about it in the past tense and testified firmly that it had happened, to teach the certainty of his [God’s] words - may he be blessed - and his positive promise that can never change and his beneficent message that will not be altered. [231]

There are numerous examples of this literary technique throughout the Old Testament. For example in the story of Noah:

But I will establish my covenant with you, and you have come into the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. [Genesis 6:18]

Here God told Noah to build the ark. After telling him how to build it, the text reads that God said, “and you have come into the ark”. The ark was not even built at that time, and when it was eventually built God goes on to tell Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family...” [Genesis 7:1]. The prophetic perfect tense in Genesis 6:18 makes it clear that Noah would absolutely enter the ark. Most English versions, not wanting to confuse the reader, read something like, “And you will enter the ark.” Another example is the story of Joseph:

And seven years of famine have arisen after them, and all the plenty is forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine hath finished the land. [Genesis 41:30]

We can see that when Joseph interpreted the King's dream, he foretold that there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. When describing the seven years of famine, he speaks of them in the prophetic perfect tense, mentioning them in the past for emphasis. To avoid confusing the reader, almost every English version says that the famine “will arise.” From these examples, we can conclude that the use of the past tense, in and of itself, does not rule out a passage being a prophecy. We need to consider the context of a passage. Coming back to Deuteronomy 33, the immediate context of the verses are a blessing bestowed upon Israel by Moses: “And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel...”. The idea then of this being a prophecy fits the context of a blessing quite nicely, as it would mean that Moses is bestowing knowledge on his followers that is going to benefit them by providing an insight in the future.

We are now going to see how the details and sequence of the verses point to this being a reference to the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This prophecy can be divided into two parts:

1. The mention of Sinai, Seir, and Paran
2. The emergence of ten thousand saints and a law

We will now discuss each of these in detail:

The mention of Sinai, Seir, and Paran

“The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran...”

Here one can see clearly that three locations are mentioned. Sinai is in Egypt, where Moses came from with a message from God, as is clear from the statement “the Lord came from Sinai”. Seir is an allusion to Palestine, as mount Seir was situated within the ancient kingdom of Edom, which was in Palestine. This is according to commentators of the Old Testament: “Seir is the mountain land of the Edomites to the east of Sinai” [232]. Palestine is where Jesus appeared with a call to God: “[the Lord] rose up from Seir”. So this specific part of the prophecy identifies the location in which Jesus would be sent by God as a messenger, over a thousand years before Mary gave birth to him. The big question is: which location is being referred to in the final part of this prophecy, which proclaims “he shined forth from mount Paran”? While biblical geographers differ as to the exact location of Paran, they are, however, unanimous that Paran is located somewhere within Arabia. From Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible:

He dwelt in the wilderness of Paran – This is generally allowed to have been a part of the desert belonging to Arabia Petraea, in the vicinity of Mount Sinai; and this seems to be its uniform meaning in the sacred writings.

Strong’s Bible Dictionary also tells us that Paran is a desert of Arabia:

H6290 pá’rân From H6286; ornamental; Paran, a desert of Arabia: – Paran.

Sebeos, a seventh century Armenian bishop and historian, when describing the Arab conquest of his time, wrote that the Arabs “assembled and came out from Paran” [233].

Encyclopaedia Biblica edited by Reverend T. K. Cheyne asserts: “Paran refers to the Arab tribal names, farran or faran” [234].

In fact, we can narrow this location down further. Modern academic research supports the claim that Paran was indeed in a specific part of Arabia known as Hijaz, modern day Western Saudi Arabia. Irfan Shahid, one of the world’s most renowned authorities on pre-Islamic, ancient Arabian geography, and history, stated that there was a place called Pharan in Hijaz, which belonged to the Sulaym tribe [235]. Professor Haseeb Shehada, an Israeli scholar and professor, in his translation of the Samaritan version of the Torah suggested an identification of the wilderness of Paran with the desert of Western Arabia, which is known today as Hijaz [236].

In summary, we have seen that the first portion of the prophecy highlights the advent of three important individuals: Moses in Sinai, Jesus in Palestine and a third figure in Western Saudi Arabia.

The emergence of ten thousand saints and a law

This brings us onto the next part of the prophecy, “he came with ten thousands of saints; from his right hand went a fiery law for them”. The question we must now ask is, who came to or from Arabia with ten thousand saints and a law in his right hand? As we’ve seen, the third location, Paran, is a direct reference to Western Saudi Arabia. It just so happens that this is exactly where the Prophet Muhammad was born, in the city of Mecca, which is located in Western Saudi Arabia. At the time in the seventh century, the vast majority of Meccans were polytheistic in religion. Then, in 610 CE, God appointed Muhammad as His Prophet and he began to call his people to monotheism. Initially, Muhammad preached in private, and his early followers congregated in secret. When Muham-

mad eventually declared his message publicly, he and his early followers were met with increasing hostility. His mission to reform society, which included the call for his people to renounce idolatry and advocating for the rights of the poor and weak, inevitably put him on a collision course with the rich and powerful tribes of Mecca.

The leaders of Mecca instigated a sustained campaign of violence against what they saw as a rival faith and a threat to their power structure. For over a decade Muslims would go on to suffer severe persecution; they endured beatings, torture, imprisonment, and some were even killed. The leaders of Mecca even signed a pact resulting in the complete social and economic boycott of Muslims along with the tribes associated with them. Muhammad and his followers were forced by these circumstances to leave their homes and wander in the outskirts of Mecca. Confined to the harsh and barren desert valley, they struggled to survive for three years, with even food and medicine being barred to them. During what is known as the Year of Grief, Muhammad's uncle Abu Talib passed away. Abu Lahab, early Islam's arch-enemy and Muhammad's bitterest foe, replaced Abu Talib as the chief of the tribe. The persecution of the early Muslim community in Mecca intensified and in 622 CE, after suffering for nearly a decade and a half, Prophet Muhammad and his followers fled their home city of Mecca in order to escape persecution. They had to leave behind their possessions and properties which were confiscated by their enemies.

They arrived safely in the city of Medina. There, the early Muslim community regrouped and flourished. The persecution by their enemies had by no means come to an end, as over the next ten years the tribes of Mecca fought numerous wars against the Muslims. In 629 CE the Meccans broke a mutual peace treaty with the Muslims. Prophet Muhammad then led a Muslim army of ten thousand in a triumphant return to their home city of Mecca, nearly a decade after they had been forced to flee it. This historic event is known as the Conquest of Mecca:

Narrated Ibn Abbas: The Prophet left Medina (for Mecca) in the company of ten-thousand (Muslim warriors) in (the month of)

Ramadan, and that was eight and a half years after his migration to Medina. He and the Muslims who were with him, proceeded on their way to Mecca... [237]

This is an exact fulfilment of the Bible's foretelling of the coming of ten thousand saints to Mecca. These saints are the ten thousand Muslims who accompanied Muhammad in the conquest and obeyed God and His Messenger in all matters.

Prophet Muhammad did not just arrive with an army, he also brought with him the Qur'an, the law that was divinely revealed to him from God through the Angel Gabriel. The Qur'an was the book by which Prophet Muhammad judged all matters, and the fate of the Meccans was no exception. Before ordering the troops to enter Mecca, the Prophet instructed his men to lift their hands only against those who drew swords against them. He also directed them neither to lay their hands on any moveable or immovable property of the Meccans, nor to destroy anything [238]. The Muslim army entered the city peacefully. No house was robbed; no man or woman was harmed or even insulted. Prophet Muhammad's first act was to go to the Ka'aba, which Muslims believe was originally built by Abraham and Ishmael as a place of worship dedicated to the One God, but subsequently turned into a house of idolatry by the pagan Meccans. There he proceeded to destroy the idols and false gods within whilst reciting the following verse of the Qur'an: "Say, the Truth has come and falsehood gone. Verily falsehood is bound to vanish" [17:81]. Then the Prophet went before the defeated people whose hearts were trembling, waiting to see what the victorious conqueror would do with them. The Meccans were afraid because the Arabs had lived by the law of retaliation; their own practice was that of revenge and murder. Many of them were expecting some sort of punishment in accordance with the traditions of the Arabs, and Muhammad had the power to exact that punishment. But instead the Prophet granted a general amnesty to the entire population of Mecca, saying to them, "There is no censure on you on this day. May God forgive you, for He is the Most Merciful of the merciful." [239].

Muhammad could have taken vengeance against all those who had persecuted him and his people for so many years, but instead he forgave them. His merciful conduct was in accordance with the Qur'an's laws of justice: "You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives..." [4:135]. It's one thing to forgive others when you are in a position of weakness and have no choice, but it's very difficult to do so when you find yourself in a position of strength over your staunch enemies and brutal oppressors. This is one of the many beautiful qualities of Prophet Muhammad that changed the hatred in the hearts of his enemies towards love for him, as the Qur'an testifies: "And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds" [21:107].

Another point about Deuteronomy 33:2 that is worth highlighting is the chronology of events which mirror the order of revelation of the Torah, followed by the Gospel and finally the Qur'an:

And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints; from his right hand went a fiery law for them. [Deuteronomy 33:1-2]

Notice the language it uses to describe these events:

"The Lord came from Sinai..."

"...and rose up from Seir"

"...he shined forth from mount Paran"

Concerning God's first revelation, it said "The Lord came", in the second it said "and rose up", while the third said "he shined forth". It seems the revelation of the Torah resembled the break of dawn, while the revelation of the Gospel was like the rising of the sun - light and guidance increased

with it. As for the Qur'an, it is just like the appearance of the sun in the sky, with God's light and guidance spreading quicker and further East and West than with the two earlier divine revelations.

In summary, we can see that biblical prophecy was fulfilled to the letter in the advent of the Prophet of Islam. There is no other person in the entire history of mankind who emerged from Arabia in such circumstances, with ten thousand saints and a law, except the Prophet Muhammad.

The Arabian Prophecy in Isaiah 42

One of the most powerful and explicit prophecies about Prophet Muhammad in the Bible is the 42nd chapter of the Book of Isaiah, which describes itself as a prophecy about the future: "the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you" [Isaiah 42:9]. The entire chapter addresses the advent of one person: a messianic figure; a prophet king; someone with worldly as well as spiritual authority; someone connected to Arabia. We are now going to analyse the key verses of Isaiah 42:

Characteristics of the coming servant

Isaiah starts the 42nd chapter by drawing our attention to a very special person that God will send:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. [Isaiah 42:1]

Let's now analyse this verse in detail. Isaiah starts by describing this person as:

"...my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight..."

Prophet Muhammad is known as God's servant, in Arabic 'abd – ullah'.

This was mentioned by Prophet Muhammad: “Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a Servant (abd). So, call me the Servant of God (abd - ullah)” [240]. “Chosen one” implies that this person has been picked by God for an important purpose such as prophethood. For Isaiah to say that God will “delight” in this person must mean that they will be someone who is righteous in God’s sight and obedient to Him.

Isaiah also indicates that God will support the coming servant with an angel, referred to as a “spirit”:

“I will put my Spirit on him...”

What is this spirit that Isaiah speaks of? The Hebrew word used for “spirit” in Isaiah 42:1, ‘ruwach’, is used to refer to angels throughout the Old Testament. For example, in the Book of Zechariah:

These are the four spirits (ruwach) of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. [Zechariah 6:5]

Many respectable Bible commentaries interpret the four spirits (‘ruwach’) as four angels. For instance, Scofield Reference Notes states in its commentary on Zechariah 6:5:

That which is symbolized by the four chariots with their horses is not the four world-empires of Daniel, but ‘the four spirits of heaven which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth...’
These ‘spirits’ are angels...

The commentary Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible agrees:

These are the four spirits of the heavens – They cannot be literal winds: for spirits, not winds, stand before God, as His servants, as in Job, ‘the sons of God [angels] came to present themselves before the Lord’...

Likewise, Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible states:

these are the four spirits of the heavens; or, "the four winds of the heavens"... angels are called "spirits" or "winds", Psalm 104:3 they are created spirits, and so differ from God; are incorporeal ones, and so differ from men; and are immaterial and immortal, and so die not: they are spiritual subsistences, and spirits of the heavens, or heavenly spirits.

Even the Qur'an confirms that the Spirit of God, who Muslims believe is the Angel Gabriel, was sent down by God to Muhammad:

We have thus revealed a Spirit to you [Prophet] by Our command: you knew neither the Scripture nor the faith, but We made it a light, guiding with it whoever We will of Our servants. You are indeed guiding to the straight path. [42:52]

Isaiah further states that the coming servant will not just be concerned with his own people, but rather the nations of the entire world:

"...and he will bring justice to the nations"

The word translated as "justice" in Isaiah 42:1 is the Hebrew 'mishpat', which also means judgement according to biblical Hebrew dictionaries. The very fact that this prophet will bring judgement to the nations is a point to be noted. Israelite prophets did not preach to non-Israelites. Whereas Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, brought judgement for the whole world, as is clear from history. Moreover, some of the foremost authorities commenting on the book of Isaiah interpret this judgement to be comprehensive in the sense of a complete way of life, which is what Islam represents. Professor of Hebrew Christopher North stated in his commentary on Isaiah 42:1 that:

Most commentators remark that mishpat is here used absolutely, without the definite article, and that it has the comprehensive sense

of the Islamic din ("judgement"), which embraces both faith and practice. [241]

In the next verse, Isaiah goes on to give us some insight into the special person's personality: "He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets." [Isaiah 42:2]. The personality and character of Prophet Muhammad was exactly as this verse describes; his companions bore witness to the fact that he was soft in speech and did not raise his voice in the marketplace [242]. The Qur'an commands in this regard: "And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys" [31:19]. If the phrase "not cry" is meant as "not complain about the duty that God gave him", then again this describes the Prophet Muhammad. Throughout his life, he never once cried out in complaint at the mission that was given to him by God, in spite of its immense difficulty and hardship.

The Location and Reaction to God's Servant

Isaiah reveals two very important details about God's coming servant, both his location and how the people will react when he arrives:

Let the wilderness and its towns raise their voices; let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops. [Isaiah 42:11]

We will first analyse the location. The two key words used are "Kedar" and "Sela", which together pinpoint an exact location for this special person. Out of all the places on earth that Isaiah could have mentioned, he chose to highlight Kedar and Sela's location so we should pay special attention.

Who is Kedar, and where did he settle? The Old Testament tells us that Kedar was one of the sons of Ishmael: "These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam" [Genesis 25:13]. Kedar and his own sons

are specifically linked to Arabia: “Arabia and all the princes of Kedar were your favored dealers in lambs, rams, and goats; in these they did business with you” [Ezekiel 27:21].

Smith’s Bible Dictionary defines Kedar as:

...the name of a great tribe of Arabs settled on the northwest of the peninsula... That they also settled in villages or towns we find from Isaiah (Isaiah 42:11). The tribe seems to have been one of the most conspicuous of all the Ishmaelite tribes... [243]

The Keil-Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament discusses Isaiah’s use of Kedar: “The name Kedar is here the collective name of the Arabic tribes generally” [244].

These two ancient Assyrian inscriptions, dating to the seventh century BCE, associate the king of the Arabs with the land of “Qedar”:

King Esarhaddon, Prism A IV, lines 6 - 9	King Assurbanipal, Prism B VII, lines 93 - 96
<u>Hazael, king of Arabs</u> , with a sumptuous gift, came over to Nineveh, city of my sovereignty, he kissed my feet and begged me for his gods. And I had pity.	<u>Iauta son of Hazael</u> <u>king of the land of Qedar</u> paid homage to me. He approached me concerning his gods (and) begged my kingship.

Compare the description of King Hazael, described as “king of the Arabs”, with that of his son King Iauta, who is described as “king of the land of Qedar”. This shows us that the land of the Arabs was associated with Kedar even in ancient times.

We've established that Kedar dwelt in Arabia. In fact, Kedar dwelt within a specific part of Arabia known as Hijaz, modern day Western Saudi Arabia. The Old Testament scholar Charles Foster confirms that Kedar dwelt in Western Saudi Arabia (Hijaz/Hedjaz):

Namely, of the land of Kedar; which every reader conversant with Arabian geography will recognise as a most accurate delineation of the district of Hedjaz [Western Saudi Arabia], including its famous cities of Mecca and Madina. [245]

Even ancient, pre-Islamic Arab traditions state that Kedar settled in Western Saudi Arabia, and that his descendants have ruled there ever since [246].

In summary we have established that Kedar and his descendants settled in a specific part of Arabia, which is modern day Saudi Arabia. In fact we can narrow the location down further, recall that Isaiah mentions Kedar in association with "Sela":

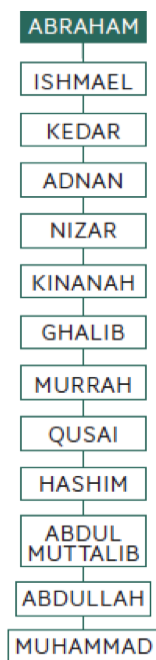
"... let the settlements where Kedar lives rejoice. Let the people of Sela sing for joy..."

Just where is "Sela"? The location being spoken of must be the Arabian city of Medina because Sela is the name of a famous mountain in Medina. Recall that Medina was Prophet Muhammad's adopted city whilst in exile after the Muslims fled Meccan persecution. You can find mention of Sela mountain throughout the statements of the companions of Prophet Muhammad. For example:

...while I was sitting in the condition which God described, my very soul seemed straitened to me and even the earth seemed narrow to me for all its spaciousness, there I heard the voice of one who had ascended the mountain of Sala calling with his loudest voice, 'O Ka'b bin Malik! Be happy (by receiving good tidings).' I fell down in prostration before God, realising that relief has come... [247]

...by God, we did not see any cloud or any patch of it, and there was neither any house or building standing between us and Sala... [248]

As well as being linked to Kedar and Sela geographically, Prophet Muhammad's genealogy is also linked. His lineage can be traced back to Abraham directly through Kedar:



One of the earliest biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, *Tabaqat Ibn Sa'd* (d. 845 CE), documents one of the chains of genealogy, which confirms that he was a direct descendant of Abraham through his grandson Kedar. Hayden's Bible dictionary states: "Mohammad is said to have been of the Bene-Kedar [sons of Kedar]" [249].

Now that we've established the location of Kedar and Sela as the Arabian city of Medina, we can analyse the next part of the prophecy. Recall that Isaiah not only reveals to us the location of God's servant, but also describes how the people will react when the awaited one arrives:

“...Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountain-tops...”

We are told that the people of Sela will sing with joy. Amazingly, Isaiah describes exactly what happened when the Prophet Muhammad arrived in Medina, its inhabitants were overjoyed and cried out in happiness:

I never saw the people of Medina so happy with anything as they were with his arrival. I even saw the little boys and girls saying, “Here is the Messenger of God; he has come!” [250]

And we came to Medina during the night and the people began to contend as to where God’s Messenger should reside... then people climbed upon house-tops and women also and boys scattered in the way, and they were all crying: ‘Muhammad, Messenger of God! Muhammad, Messenger of God!’ [251]

No one else has been received by the people of Medina in such a way; Muhammad is the only person in history who fulfils this very specific prediction made by Isaiah.

What God’s Servant Will Bring

Isaiah reveals that the coming servant will bring justice and a new law:

He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope. [Isaiah 42:4]

The first part of this verse mentions:

“He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth...”

Early into his mission when the Muslims were in a position of weakness, Prophet Muhammad was offered every worldly gain imaginable to try and persuade him to stop preaching the message of Islam. When his enemies

realised that nothing would discourage him from preaching his message, they turned to more aggressive tactics. Prophet Muhammad went on to face extreme persecution and hostility in Mecca but he still did not give up the message of Islam. He did not rest until the just rule of Islam was firmly established within his lifetime. Even though he often faced extraordinary odds in battles, the Prophet was not discouraged. Instead, the Qur'an talks about the faith of Muhammad and his companions rising when they were outnumbered by their enemies. Prophet Muhammad survived several attempts on his life, until he completed his mission and established justice by judging people according to the laws of God. Indeed the message of Islam was completed, the Qur'an declares: "Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and chosen as your religion Islam..." [5:3].

The second part of the verse in Isaiah mentions:

"...In his teaching the islands will put their hope"

Here Isaiah informs us that God's servant will bring forth a new law. The word translated as "teaching" is the Hebrew "Torah" which means instruction or law. According to commentators on the Bible this word "has in the total context of this passage almost the sense of 'revelation'" [252]. Notice that Isaiah states that the islands will put their hope in his law, implying he will bring forth something new, something different, as the Law of Moses already existed at the time Isaiah made this prophecy. Another point is that the islands are said to put their hope in his new Torah in the future tense, again implying it is a new law and therefore unlikely to be a reference to the Torah of Moses which already existed at the time that Isaiah made this prophecy. The Qur'an given to Prophet Muhammad fits this description perfectly as it was a new book revealed after the time of Isaiah:

We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down... [5:48]

The coming of Muhammad in the seventh century not only transformed Arabia but also other lands, with the law of Islam rapidly spreading as far East as northern China and as far West as southern France. The advent of Islam represented an important turning point in history for people who were under persecution around the world. One such example is the liberation of Jerusalem. Prior to Islam, Jerusalem had been under the occupation and persecution of the Romans for more than 500 years. It was a Muslim army, led by Umar Bin Khattab, a companion of Muhammad and the second Caliph of the Muslims, that liberated the Holy Land from Roman occupation. The tenth century Jewish polemicist and writer Salmon Ben Yeruhim comments:

As we know, the Temple remained in the hands of the Romans for more than 500 years and they [the Jews] did not succeed in entering Jerusalem; and anyone who did and was recognised [as a Jew] was put to death. But when the Romans left it, by the mercy of the God of Israel, the kingdom of Ishmael was victorious, Israel was permitted to come and to live. [253]

Under Roman rule, the Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism, had been left in ruin and was even turned into a rubbish dump. The Romans would discard menstrual cloths and all kinds of filth at the site of the temple [254]. This was as a result of prevailing attitudes in the Church towards Judaism. For the Church Fathers, the separation of the Jews from Jerusalem and the obliteration of any remnant of their Temple was seen as divine retribution. The fourth century Church Father Jerome wrote of his satisfaction at the disappearance of the Jews who were considered the enemies of Christianity:

Until this very day, those hypocritical tenants are forbidden to come to Jerusalem, because of the murder of the prophets and the last of them: the Son of God, unless [they come] to weep, for then they are given permission to lament over the ruins of the city in exchange for a payment. Just as they purchased the blood of the Messiah, now they are purchasing their own tears; therefore, even the lamentation is not given them for naught. [255]

For both Jewish and Christian inhabitants of the Holy Land, Islamic rule signalled the age of tolerance. It became a historical age where people of different beliefs lived in peace and harmony in Jerusalem. The leading biblical scholar Michael Coogan writes: "Caliph Umar's forces would neither massacre its inhabitants nor destroy the religious monuments of the vanquished" [256]. The ninth century patriarch Theodosius of Jerusalem wrote with regard to the Muslim treatment of Christians: "The Saracens [i.e. the Muslims] show us great goodwill. They allow us to build our churches and to observe our own customs without hindrance" [257].

Under Muslim rule, the Jewish holy sites were restored. A Jewish chronicle of the time describes how the cleaning of the Temple Mount proceeded under the watchful eye of the Caliph Umar:

Taking part were all the Muslims in the city and in the district and participating with them were a group of Jews; afterwards they were ordered to evacuate the rubbish from the sanctuary and to clean it; and Umar watched them all the time. Whenever a remnant was revealed, he would ask the elders of the Jews about the rock, and one of the sages would mark out the boundaries of the place, until it was uncovered. [258]

Moreover the Jewish people were welcomed back into Jerusalem and lived in peace along with their Arab brethren. Daniel al-Qumusi, an eminent ninth century Jewish scholar, wrote the following:

For before he came they could not come to Jerusalem; and they would come from the four corners of the earth to Tiberias and Gaza to see the Temple; but now with his coming he brought them to Jerusalem and gave them place and many of the Israelites settled there; and afterwards people came from four corners of the earth to Jerusalem to preach and pray. [259]

History bears witness to the fact that when Islamic law came to many different lands, their persecuted populations welcomed the Muslim armies

as liberators. This happened in Syria, Egypt, and Spain [260]. With the advent of Islam all the oppressive powers surrounding Arabia fell one after another and the masses could live in peace from then on. Just what is it that drove Muhammad and his followers to liberate not only their own people from tyranny, but also help to free their neighbours? The Qur'an stipulates that Muslims must help the oppressed, regardless of whom, and where, they are:

And what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of God and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, "Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from Yourself a helper?" [4:75]

Who He Will Be Sent To

Isaiah reveals the target audience of the coming servant:

I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles. [Isaiah 42:6]

Gentiles mean non-Jews, so here Isaiah emphasises the universal mission of the coming person. The Qur'an confirms that Prophet Muhammad was sent to the whole of mankind, Jews, and Gentiles alike: "We have sent you [O Prophet] as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner for the whole of mankind, but most people have no knowledge" [34:28].

Isaiah further states that God will:

...lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them... [Isaiah 42:16]

The pagan Arabs at the time of Prophet Muhammad fit this description perfectly because they had not been sent a messenger prior to Muham-

mad. The Qur'an bears witness to this, God states that Muhammad was sent to: "...warn a people to whom no warner has come before..." [32:3].

Isaiah also highlights the worship of idols:

I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another
or my praise to idols. [Isaiah 42:8]

This again is a very specific point in this prophecy. The whole of Arabia at the start of Muhammad's prophethood consisted of idol worshippers. In fact, Muhammad's people, the Meccans, had 360 different idols for worship and each of these idols was thought to be taking care of a specific duty. The Qur'an talks about them in the following manner:

Say [O Muhammad] "who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?"
Say "God." Say "have you then taken [for worship] protectors other
than Him, such as have no power either for benefit or for harm to
themselves?" Say "is the blind equal to the one who sees? Or dark-
ness equal to light? Or do they assign partners to God who created
the like of His creation, so that the creation seem alike to them?" Say
"God is the creator of all things; and He is the One, the Irresistible."
[13:16]

It is very clear in the verse above that God is condemning the idol worshippers and their attribution of divine qualities to carved wood and stone. The verse from Isaiah 42 states that God will never give His glory to another and his praise will not be attributed to carved images. The Prophet of Islam was clearly facing people who had attributed the qualities of God to graven images and the Prophet's main task was to reclaim the glory of God for God alone.

What Will God's Servant Achieve

Isaiah gives us a list of momentous achievements for the coming servant:

The Lord will march out like a champion, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies. [Isaiah 42:13]

Here Isaiah, in biblical language, is asserting that the foretold servant will triumph against the enemies of God. Prophet Muhammad fought 27 battles in person, and his enemies employed all possible means to destroy Islam but they failed, as God had promised to protect his messenger. In the battle of the ditch (also known as the battle of armies (Ahzab) due to the participation of many tribes) over ten thousand men besieged Medina but they failed to defeat the Prophet and his companions. Islam was victorious and Islam endured. The historian Howard Johnston describes the triumph of Islam: “Seldom, if ever, has a set of ideas had so great an effect on human societies as Islam has done, above all in the first half of the seventh century. In little more than twenty years, the religious and political configuration of Arabia was changed out of all recognition. Within another twenty all of the rich, highly developed, militarily powerful world enveloping Arabia was conquered, save for Asia Minor and North Africa” [261].

Isaiah further states that the enemies of God mentioned earlier are in fact idol worshippers and that they will be defeated:

But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in utter shame. [Isaiah 42:17]

There is a very clear reference to idol worshippers here. God is informing us that the idol worshipers will be shamed due to their disbelief in the one true God, the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. The Prophet Muhammad fought most of his battles against idolaters and they were eventually put to shame on the day of the conquest of Mecca. All 360 idols worshipped by the Meccans were destroyed. The idolaters lost their power forever and were utterly ashamed, with two thousand Meccans renouncing idol worship and embracing Islam. As we’ve already seen, it is this incident which was foretold in Deuteronomy 33:2, as the

Prophet was accompanied by ten thousand men in this expedition and the law of Islam was presented to the people of Mecca. It was this city which contained the biggest idol worshipping establishment in Arabia. However, in just 23 years of prophethood, it ceased to function as a centre of idolatry. Not only did Prophet Muhammad conquer Mecca, the Pagan capital of Arabia, but by the end of his life much of Arabia had shunned idol worship and now worshipped the One true God.

Why the Masses Are Unaware of Such Prophecies

You may be wondering: if such biblical prophecies really are about Muhammad, then why is it that Jewish and Christian scholars are not aware of them? To help answer this question, it's important to understand that historically we know there was a presence of various Jewish tribes in and around the city of Medina before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad. Both Jewish Historians and Islamic history records this fact. The American historian Salo Baron, the most noted historian of the Jews of his generation, recorded the following in his book *Social and Religious History of the Jews*:

Judaic presence and influence throughout the region burgeoned steadily throughout the first few centuries of the Common Era. The process is substantiated by solidly sympathetic references to Jews and Judaism in pre-Islamic Arabic literature. By the sixth century, it is clear that Jewish tribes dominated Yathrib (Medina)... [262]

Alexander Marx, an American historian, and Max Margolis, an American philologist, wrote the following in their book *A History of the Jewish People*:

In the northwest of the peninsula the Jews occupied the oases on the line of the caravan route running from north to south. Taima, Fadak, Khaibar, Wadi-l-Kura (Vale of Villages) were in their hands and

Yathrib (later Medina) was in all probability founded by them... [In] Yemen, their industry and enterprising spirit helped to revive the prosperity of the country. [263]

According to Montgomery Watt, a Scottish historian and Professor in Arabic and Islamic Studies, the Jewish tribes had previously dominated the political, economic, and intellectual life of Medina [264].

The answer to why there were numerous Jewish tribes within Medina is that the scholars among them were aware of prophecies like those found in Deuteronomy and Isaiah, and they were anxiously awaiting the coming of a new prophet. Islamic history records the fact that before the advent of Muhammad's prophethood, whenever a dispute arose between the Jewish tribes and Arabs in Medina, they would taunt their pagan Arab neighbours, by saying: "when our prophet arrives we shall obliterate you..." [265]. The Qur'an affirms this as God says: "Is it not a sign to them that the learned men of the Children of Israel knew it (as true)?" [26:197]. We can learn more about these Jewish tribes of Arabia by looking to early Islamic sources. These state that as well as there being a presence of a number of large, powerful Jewish tribes residing in and around the city of Medina, there was even a huge Jewish settlement in Arabia called Khaybar. Some of the most influential of these tribes were the Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayza. These were called 'al-kahinan' ("the two priestly tribes") [266]. This is because these tribes claimed descent from 'al-Kahin', the son of biblical Aaron. Al-Kahin is the Arabised version of the Hebrew 'Kohen', which means "priest". Even in the Old Testament, Jewish law stipulates that the priests who served in the temple must descend from Aaron. Safiyya, the Jewish daughter of the chief of the Banu Nadir tribe, is even referred to by the Prophet Muhammad as a daughter of Prophet Aaron [267].

In summary, early Islamic sources reveal the following about the Jews of Medina:

- They were part of large tribes that pre-dated Muhammad's arrival in the city

- Some of these tribes claimed descent from Aaron, as such they were priests
- They must have had deep knowledge of their scriptures, as they knew of the impending arrival of a new Prophet in the city of Medina

If we look to early Jewish sources, we find support for this. The Jerusalem Talmud, also known as Talmud Yerushalmi, is a collection of fourth and fifth century Rabbinic commentaries. It states that Jewish priests from the first temple period travelled to Arabia and lived among the Ishmaelites: “80,000 young priests (broke through) Nebuchadnezzar’s armies and went to the Ishmaelites...” [268]. The Jerusalem Talmud even interprets Isaiah 21 as a reference to the departed priests:

That is what is written, ‘load in Arabia’, a large load on Arabia. ‘In a forest in Arabia they will stay’ [Isaiah 21:13], those that should have been in the forest of Lebanon [the temple, 1 Kings 7:2], ‘in Arabia they will stay.’ [269]

The claim that Jewish tribes were awaiting the arrival of a Prophet in Arabia is further supported by writings such as the Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai, a Jewish apocalypse of the mid-eighth century which presents a Judaic messianic interpretation of the advent of Islam. It contains a positive endorsement of the mission of Muhammad and an affirmation of the divinely mandated role of the Arabs in saving the Jewish people from persecution:

When he saw the kingdom of Ishmael that was coming, he began to say: ‘Was it not enough, what the wicked kingdom of Edom did to us, but we must have the kingdom of Ishmael too?’ At once Metatron the prince of the countenance answered and said: ‘Do not fear, son of man, for the Holy One, blessed be He, only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from this wickedness. He raises up over them a prophet according to his will and will conquer the land for

them and they will come and restore it in greatness, and there will be great terror between them and the sons of Esau.' Rabbi Simon answered and said: 'How do we know that they are our salvation?' He answered: 'Did not the Prophet Isaiah say thus: "And he saw a troop with a pair of horsemen, etc."' [270]

These statements provide a fascinating insight into an eighth century Rabbinic understanding of the conquests of the Muslims. Some of the key points mentioned:

"for the Holy One only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from this wickedness..."

"He raises up over them a Prophet according to his will and will conquer the land for them and they will come and restore it in greatness..."

Did not the Prophet Isaiah say thus: "And he saw a troop with a pair of horsemen..."

What this demonstrates is that early Jewish scholars were open to the idea of a prophet emerging from among the Arabs, and we can see that some even interpreted sections of Isaiah as prophecies that have been fulfilled by the arrival of Muhammad. Some early Christian scholars also attributed the rise of Islam to God and linked it to biblical prophecy. John Bar Penkaye, a seventh century Christian monk and contemporary of the early Islamic conquests, wrote:

When the kingdom of the Persians came to an end, in the days of their king Khosro, the kingdom of the children of Hagar at once gained control over more or less the whole world, for they took the whole kingdom of the Persians, overthrowing all their warriors who prided themselves in the arts of war. We should not think of the advent (of the children of Hagar) as something ordinary, but as due to divine working. Before calling them, (God) had prepared

them beforehand to hold Christians in honour; thus they also had a special commandment from God concerning our monastic station, that they should hold it in honour. Now when these people came, at God's command, and took over as it were both kingdoms, not with any war or battle, but in a menial fashion, such as when a brand is rescued out of the fire, not using weapons of war or human means, God put victory into their hands in such a way that the words written them might be fulfilled, namely, "One man chased a thousand and two routed ten thousand." How otherwise, could naked men, riding without armour or shield, have been able to win, apart from divine aid, God having called them from the ends of the earth so as to destroy, by them "a sinful kingdom" and to bring low, through them, the proud spirit of the Persians. [271]

Some of the key points mentioned:

"We should not think of the advent (of the children of Hagar) as something ordinary, but as due to divine working..."

God put victory into their hands in such a way that the words written them might be fulfilled, namely, "One man chased a thousand and two routed ten thousand."

Here John Bar Penkaye has cited the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy as a prophecy fulfilled by the early Muslims: "How could one man chase a thousand, or two put ten thousand to flight, unless their Rock had sold them, unless the Lord had given them up?" [Deuteronomy 32:30].

Some early Jewish and Christian scholars even embraced Islam with the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad. Some famous examples include Jewish Rabbis such as Abdullah ibn Salaam and Ka'ab Al Ahbar who were leading scholars of the Torah at the time of the Prophet Muhammad [272].

Such frank acknowledgements of Muhammad's presence in the Bible are sadly rare these days, as many of those who are learned from among the

Christians and the Jews no longer teach the biblical lineage of Muhammad. The likes of Deuteronomy 33 and Isaiah 42 have become forbidden prophecies. They are not forbidden in the sense that they are inaccessible to the general public, for they are present in all Bibles and can be read by anyone. Rather, they have become forbidden because their true and proper context as Arabian prophecies is not taught, and therefore they are ‘hidden in plain sight’, with the general masses unaware of their existence. Earlier in the book we looked at a number of individuals who have managed to deceive the masses by claiming that they have insight into the future. What we have here with many learned Jewish and Christian scholars is a different type of deception, a covering up of the truth. Many of these scholars recognise the prophethood of Muhammad, even if they do not publicly admit it. The Qur’an testifies to this: “Those to whom We have given the Scripture recognise him [Muhammad] as they recognise their [own] sons” [6:20]. Why would they cover up the truth? One possible motivation is worldly gain. Judaism has the concept of the Jewish people being God’s chosen people. While Islam also teaches that God favoured the Jewish people with a covenant at one point in time, this does not mean that they were given an exclusive covenant until the end of time. With the advent of the final prophet, Muhammad, no particular race or nationality can claim a monopoly on God. All of mankind – Jew and non-Jew alike – have now been favoured by God’s guidance, as prophesied by Isaiah (“I will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles” [Isaiah 42:6]). Christianity has the concept of priesthood which, historically speaking, has granted its clergy the most power and control in society. It’s therefore not surprising that the dawn of Islam would be feared by the scholars among the Jews and Christians, as Islam is a religion that grants no special status on the basis of race and it lacks a priesthood, so it diminishes their authority and control among people.

Another indication that these prophecies about Muhammad are being covered up can be found in the inconsistent methodology used to interpret Bible prophecy. For example, it is claimed that there are over three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament which have been fulfilled by Jesus within the New Testament. Muslims also believe that Jesus is a

Prophet sent by God. However, the problem with this claim is that if one examines these prophecies, you will find that many of them are unspecific and they must be stretched in order to make them fit the person of Jesus. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew:

When he arose, he took the young child [Jesus] and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. [Matthew 2:14-15]

So according to the Gospel of Matthew, there's a prophecy in the Old Testament that was fulfilled by Jesus. But when one goes back to Hosea in the Old Testament where the passage is referenced from, you will find that only half the passage has been quoted:

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. [Hosea 11:1]

As you can see, when read in full, rather than being a prophecy about Jesus, this verse was in fact speaking of a past event, the exodus of the Israelites at the time of Moses.

In another example, the Gospel of Matthew quotes a non-existent prophecy from the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah:

Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me." [Matthew 27:9-10]

Here the Gospel of Matthew is making the point that the betrayal of Jesus by Judas for thirty pieces of silver was foretold by Jeremiah. The problem is that when one looks to the Book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament, no such prophecy is found. It is actually found in the Book of Zechariah:

I told them, “If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.” So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the handsome price at which they valued me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord. [Zechariah 11:12-13]

Also, if we compare the details of this prophecy in the Gospel of Matthew with the Book of Acts, we find conflicting details. Whereas the Gospel of Matthew mentions that it was “they” (i.e. the Chief Priests) who purchased the potter’s field, the Book of Acts states that it was Judas himself who purchased the field:

Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines. The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means “Field of Blood.” [Acts 1:18]

So not only is the wrong book of the Old Testament named in the Gospel of Matthew, but the details are different compared to the Book of Acts. If Christian scholars have no issue accepting this standard for prophecies about Jesus, then in the name of fairness and consistency they should accept Muhammad as a prophet, as the prophecies that we have covered about him are much more clear and consistent. Christian scholars should adopt a methodology that is fair and consistent when it comes to finding prophecies of Jesus and Muhammad in the Old Testament. We can’t have one set of standards for Muhammad, and another for Jesus, especially when the prophecies about Muhammad such as Deuteronomy 33 and Isaiah 42 are far more accurate.

Another biblical proof for Muhammad’s prophethood can be found in Deuteronomy 18:

But you may wonder, ‘How will we know whether or not a prophecy is from the Lord?’ If the prophet speaks in the Lord’s name but his

prediction does not happen or come true, you will know that the Lord did not give that message. That prophet has spoken without my authority and need not be feared. [Deuteronomy 18:21-22]

Only a genuine prophet of God, those who have been given an insight into the future as part of God's revelation to them, will be able to make predictions about the future that are not only detailed, but always come to pass. Muhammad clearly passes this test, as we saw in the previous chapter that his numerous predictions have all come to pass, thus fulfilling this biblical standard. We can see that if these scholars applied the Bible's standard for prophethood consistently then they would have to openly acknowledge Muhammad as a Prophet.

In the previous chapters we've seen that from many different angles, whether it's his life, personality, or accurate predictions, Muhammad is a genuine prophet of God. To this we can also add that there is external evidence that points to his prophethood, in the form of ancient religious texts which foretold his coming thousands of years before he was even born. In this chapter, we have analysed two such prophecies in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 33 and Isaiah 42, which both clearly foretell the coming of a special, world-changing individual with the following qualities:

- He will be associated with Paran, Kedar and Sela. Careful analysis of these points to the Arabian cities of Mecca and Medina,
- he will be accompanied by ten thousand saints and a new law,
- he will be a warrior who will do battle with an idolatrous people,
- he will bring light to the Gentiles (i.e. non-Jews),
- he will spread peace and justice in the world

In the thousands of years since these prophecies were foretold, which personality in history can such things be attributed to? It can be none

other than Prophet Muhammad. It's important to note that even though these prophecies come from the Bible, one does not need to be a Jew or Christian to appreciate them. This is because they are very detailed ancient prophecies and he is the only person in history to have fulfilled them. Perhaps these findings come as a shock, because such prophecies are not typically presented in their Arabian context. There may be a temptation to sweep this information under the rug and to cling to what one has learnt previously. There's a famous slogan in Christianity, 'what would Jesus do?' Jesus, or any sincere truth seeker for that matter, would undoubtedly follow the truth wholeheartedly, no matter where it leads to.

CHAPTER 4

Islam and the End of the World

On our journey so far we've seen the amazing insight into the future that the Prophet Muhammad was given. In fact, his predictions went far beyond the events that would impact the people of our present age, as they extend to the momentous, world-changing events that will take place just before the end of the world: "The Prophet once delivered a speech in front of us wherein he left nothing but mentioned (about) everything that would happen till the Hour" [273]. The Hour is the time when the end of the world will take place, and God says in the Qur'an that it is knowledge that He alone possesses: "They ask you, [O Muhammad], about the Hour: when is its arrival? Say, 'Its knowledge is only with my Lord'" [7:187].

Although God alone knows its exact timing, the Prophet Muhammad was inspired with knowledge of the minor signs and major signs that will precede it, indicating when the end is near. Islam goes into immense detail about the signs of the end of the world. Prophet Muhammad taught that the world will one day descend into a state of unprecedented evil.

Even for those who try to resist evil and follow religion, it will be a time of immense hardship: "There will come upon the people a time when holding onto the religion will be like holding onto hot coal" [274]. This will be an age characterised by corruption at all levels of society with people living in a spiritual void. It is against this backdrop that mankind will witness the emergence of the greatest trial and tribulation that will ever befall it, the Dajjal: "From the time of the creation of Adam until the Hour begins, there will never be a bigger creation than the Dajjal" [275]. The Dajjal is the False Messiah, or Antichrist, who will appear near the end of time, claim to be God on earth and demand our obedience and worship. Prophet Muhammad went into great detail describing the Dajjal's appearance. He even revealed some information about the Dajjal that no other Prophet knew of: "I am to say something about him [Dajjal] that no Prophet has said to his people: You should know that he is one-eyed, and God is certainly not one-eyed" [276]. Prophet Muhammad even specified which eye would be blind: "The Dajjal is blind in his right eye and his eye looks like a protruding grape" [277]. We are informed that the Dajjal will perform wonders that will amaze people, for example he will command the sky and its rain, such that those who submit to him will have crops, but those that reject him will suffer from drought:

He would then give command to the sky and there would be rainfall upon the earth and it would grow crops. Then in the evening, their pasturing animals would come to them with their humps very high and their udders full of milk and their flanks stretched. He would then come to another people and invite them. But they would reject him and he would go away from them and there would be drought for them and nothing would be left with them in the form of wealth. [278]

He will spread corruption throughout the earth and ultimately amass many followers. Prophet Muhammad taught that although this is a great age of evil, some true believers will still remain: "A group of people from my nation will always remain triumphant on the right path and continue to be triumphant..." [279]. It is at this time that a righteous man will appear.

He is known as the Mahdi, which means “guided one”. The Mahdi will unite the believers under one banner and lead them in a fight against the Dajjal. At this critical juncture in history, which represents the ultimate battle between good and evil, God will send the true Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary. Islam teaches that Jesus, although a great Prophet of God, is nothing more than a man, just like Muhammad and the rest of God’s Prophets. Jesus will descend from heaven while resting his hands on the wings of two angels, coming down to the white minaret in the East of Damascus, Syria. He will join the Mahdi and the believers who will all come together and Jesus will kill the Dajjal [280]. He will restore peace and justice and there will be so much blessing that money will be plentiful to such an extent that no one will need charity [281]. Jesus will break the cross, which symbolically represents his rejection of the idolatry that was ascribed to him by Christians after he left the earth. Jesus will live for forty more years on earth during which time he will rule the world. He will then die and be buried [282].

The Prophet Muhammad taught that every Prophet warned his people about the Dajjal: “I warn you of him, and there was no prophet but warned his followers of him” [283]. In addition, the Qur’an informs us that every nation has, at some point in its history, been sent a messenger by God: “We sent a messenger to every community, saying, ‘Worship God and shun false gods’” [16:36]. So, we should expect to find mention of events similar to the Islamic account in other ancient religions. This is exactly what we find when we examine the other Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Christianity. Judaism also speaks of great battles in which the nations will gather against believers. The Messiah is a kingly figure whose government will be the centre of all world government, ushering in an era of peace, with no more wars. He will establish God’s law on earth, and all mankind will worship one God and live a more spiritual and moral way of life [284]. Christianity teaches that the Antichrist, a false Messiah, will be a man who will emerge near the end of the world, performing great signs and wonders that will deceive many. This is when Jesus will return to earth, descending from heaven on the clouds. Jesus will fight and defeat the Antichrist, after which he will establish the kingdom of

God on earth [285]. Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest surviving religions, also has similar concepts. It teaches that the world will enter an age of evil where deceit and greed will rule. Family bonds and piety will disappear. It is said that the rulers will be so corrupt that they will see the killing of a righteous person to be no worse than killing a fly. Great battles will take place and good will ultimately triumph over evil [286]. Other religions also overlap with Islam. Hinduism teaches that in each cycle of the universe, there is a final age known as the Kali Yuga which is characterised by impiety, violence, and decay. This is a dark age in which sin will increase and prosper, while virtue will fade. People will deceive one another when they buy and sell, and they will enjoy that which has been forbidden in the scriptures. The kings of the earth will rob their subjects and take pleasure in inflicting punishments upon the innocent. The inhabited regions of the earth will be afflicted with famine because of a lack of rain and crops. In Hinduism, the source of all evil is a demon called Kali who will manifest on earth. This is when a man called Kalki will appear, who will have great prowess, glorify God and defeat the demon Kali. He will restore peace and order in this world, ushering in a new age of prosperity [287].

This common ground between all these different ancient religions should not come as a surprise, as Muhammad claimed that every Prophet warned his people about the Dajjal. So Muhammad not only revealed what would happen in the future, but he clearly had insight into the ancient past as well, which is another sign of prophethood. It's important to note that while these different religions do support one another when it comes to many aspects of the End Times, they also contradict one another on fundamental theological issues. This is an indication that not everything they teach is the truth as they make different claims. Had all the teachings of these different religions originated from Prophets who were divinely inspired by the same God, then it stands to reason that they would be in perfect harmony without any contradictions. This brings to mind a critical question, how can the sincere truth seeker differentiate between what in these ancient religions has been falsified and what genuinely originates from a prophet of God? In chapter 2, we saw that the Qur'an

and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad have immense insight into the future, which establishes their divine credentials and authority. We have also seen that they are flawlessly preserved by virtue of having been continuously memorised by masses of people through history, which means we can trust what they teach because they can be traced back directly to the Prophet Muhammad. In fact, one of the names of the Qur'an is 'Al Furqan', meaning "the Criterion between truth and falsehood". So the Qur'an not only confirms the scriptures that came before it, but also corrects the falsehoods that have entered them: "And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what God has revealed..." [5:48].

Why did God grant us some insight into the future? It's important to note that prophecies are not present for the sake of entertainment; they serve a noble purpose. Earlier in the book, we looked at many examples of accurately fulfilled predictions made by Muhammad. Such prophecies are a means by which God establishes the truth of His own existence to mankind, for only He could have inspired Muhammad with such knowledge. They also serve as a means of allowing us to distinguish His true prophets from the many false prophets that are out there. Prophecies are our looking glass into the future and act as signposts to turn our attention to important people and events ahead of time. From this point of view, they are a form of guidance, and so we should investigate them for our worldly benefit. These prophecies also carry spiritual significance: many of them relate to signs of the coming Day of Judgement and so they serve as a reminder to mankind that each fulfilled prophecy brings us one step closer to the momentous day when we will stand before our Creator. God reminds mankind in the Qur'an: "Closer and closer to mankind comes their Reckoning; yet they heed not and they turn away" [21:1].

The Prophet Muhammad taught that a critical astronomical sign will occur close to the end of the world: "Whoever repents before the sun rises from the west, then God will forgive him" [288]. We are informed that God will one day cause the sun to rise in the opposite hemisphere.

This is a momentous event of cosmic proportions that signifies the imminent end of the world and a point of no return for mankind when our repentance will no longer be accepted by God. This is one of the major signs of the end of the world, and in this chapter we've covered other major signs which have also yet to happen. Some of us may feel disconnected from such prophecies, perhaps we view them as far-off events in the distant future and so we may feel secure in the thought that the end of the world is not something we will have to worry about during our own lifetime. But the reality is that every one of us will experience an end of the world, death. For every human being, the end begins the moment we die. Tomorrow is not guaranteed, the graveyards are filled with people whose lives came to an end when they least expected it. The Prophet Muhammad captured this sentiment when he responded to a question about when the world would end. He was asked, "When will the Hour be established?" Muhammad responded by saying, "What have you prepared for it?" [289].

This brings us to the purpose of life. A popular view about life is that it is "just a game". However, is life just a game? The Qur'an informs us that this is not the case: "And We created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, for mere play" [44:38]. God tells us that we were created for a noble purpose, to worship Him: "I created jinn [spirits] and mankind only to worship Me" [51:56]. Many people think of worship as just prayer, but in Islam it is so much more than that. It also includes loving, obeying, and showing gratitude to God for everything that He has given us: "If you tried to count God's favours you could never enumerate them..." [14:34]. Our temporary life here on earth is a test, and ultimately every living soul will die and return to God: "Every soul is certain to taste death: We test you all through the bad and the good, and to Us you will all return" [21:35]. God didn't create the universe and everything in it only to leave us all to our own devices. The test of our earthly life is to see who will submit to God and follow His guidance, and who will reject it. The core message of the Qur'an is that there is only one God and He alone is worthy of our worship. God is eternal, having neither beginning nor end. God is not a man, nor does He resemble anything else in the

creation, rather He is the creator of everything in existence, and He is absolutely unique:

Say, 'He is God the One,

God the eternal.

He begot no one nor was He begotten.

No one is comparable to Him.' [Qur'an, Chapter 112]

Not only is life not a game, but our death here on earth is not the end of our existence; it marks a new chapter in which we will return to God. The Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad were not just sent as guides for our earthly existence, they both provide an immense amount of detail about the world's demise and the eternal hereafter. Islam reveals that after the major signs such as the Dajjal, Mahdi and return of Jesus, the world will enter its final phase. At an hour that is known only to God, the divine command will be issued for the trumpet to be blown, a momentous event which signifies the commencement of the Day of Judgement. The trumpet blast will reverberate through creation. The sky will be torn apart, the earth will convulse, and the mountains will disintegrate. The Qur'an tells us that everything will be destroyed and everyone will die:

When the Trumpet is sounded a single time, when the earth and its mountains are raised high and then crushed with a single blow, on that Day the Great Event will come to pass. The sky will be torn apart on that Day, it will be so frail. [69:13-16]

A second trumpet blast will sound and all of mankind will be resurrected back to life:

The Trumpet will be sounded and behold! They will rush out to their Lord from their graves. They will say, 'Woe to us! Who has resurrected us from our resting place?' They will be told, 'This is

what the Lord of Mercy has promised, and the messengers told the truth.' [36:51-52]

We will stand on a vast level plain with no landmarks at all: "We shall make the mountains move, and you will see the earth as an open plain. We shall gather all people together, leaving no one" [18:47]. The earth will have been completely transformed: "When the earth is turned into another earth, the heavens into another heaven, and people all appear before God, the One, the Overpowering" [14:48]. Prophet Muhammad informed us that we will be so overwhelmed by what is happening that even though we will be raised naked, barefoot, and uncircumcised, we will be in far too much terror to take note of our nakedness:

"The people will be assembled barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised." I said, 'O Messenger of God, will the men and women look at each other?' The Prophet said, "The matter will be too serious for them to notice." [290]

The Qur'an explains that all the years and decades we spent here on earth, all the pleasures we experienced and hardships we endured, will be a distant memory. Our present lives are but a drop in the ocean compared to the hereafter. As we stare into eternity, our entire life will feel as if it were a brief passing moment:

When the trumpet is sounded and We gather the sinful, sightless, they will murmur to one another, 'You stayed only ten days [on earth]'– We know best what they say– but the more perceptive of them will say, 'Your stay [on earth] was only a single day.' [20:102-104]

Every action that we perform during our lives is being recorded and we will have to answer to God for everything we have said and done: "On that Day, people will come forward in separate groups to be shown their deeds: whoever has done an atom's weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom's weight of evil will see that" [99:6-8]. We

mentioned earlier that our temporary lives here on earth are a test, and like with any test there will be an outcome. Those who believed in God, worshipped Him alone without associating any partners with Him, and did righteous deeds, will be rewarded with eternal bliss in Paradise: "... while those who believe and do good deeds will be the inhabitants of the Garden, there to remain" [2:82]. For those who chose to reject God and His guidance, there is a terrible punishment in store: "And for those who disbelieved in their Lord is the punishment of Hell, and wretched is the destination" [67:6]. Islam values the good and those who accept the truth. It contrasts those who obey God and thereby do good, and those who are defiantly disobedient, and thereby do evil: "Then is one who was a believer like one who was defiantly disobedient? They are not equal" [32:18]. We have a choice: to embrace God's eternal unbounded mercy, or to run away from it. Accepting His mercy, by responding to His message, and obeying, worshipping and loving Him, will facilitate our eternal happiness in Paradise. Rejecting and running away from God's mercy will ultimately lead to spending eternity in a place devoid of His love, a place of unhappiness – Hell. Remember, we have a choice. We decide to embrace His mercy or to escape. We have the free will to choose. The choices we make in this life will shape our fates in the eternal hereafter.

Perhaps you want to get an answer to these important existential questions, but have been put off in the past because of bad experiences. There are people throughout history who have understood the psychological and spiritual needs that we have as humans. While some philosophers and spiritual people have made sincere attempts to uncover deep and profound truths about human nature to help and improve our lives, others have sadly exploited this need and manipulated people for their own benefit. We have seen numerous examples of false prophets in this book. However, this does not mean that all religions must be bad because some are bad; this is an important point and a common mistake that many make. Religion is a very powerful tool for control and there will always be people who are going to manipulate it. But that does not mean that we shouldn't try hard to get to the truth.

In this book, we have analysed the most popular systems of prophecy in history. We have covered a wide variety of different prophets, ancient sacred texts, methods, and superstitions which today hold sway over the lives of millions of people. All but Muhammad have fallen short when they are put to the test. The numerous examples that we've analysed span different societies throughout history. They're a feature of the poor as well as the rich, religious as well as secular, the ancient past as well as the present. While such beliefs and practices are more common among certain groups of people than others, and even vary from place to place, they are a feature of virtually every culture that has ever existed. If you've made it to the end of this book then it suggests that you are somewhat intrigued with the world of the unseen, which perhaps you never even realised.

Today, millions of people believe in false prophets and follow false systems for guidance in life. We're willing to follow false prophets, man-made systems, and baseless superstitions, but why don't we accept the real guidance when it comes from God? When we have access to real guidance from the creator of the universe who knows the past, present and future, why is it that people don't follow that guidance? Imagine if some being did have the bigger picture about human existence and we could access that knowledge. Just imagine the blessing and benefit one would get if this energy was directed to the One who really does have the bigger picture. God revealed the Qur'an, the final book of revelation for mankind, to lead us away from following falsehood: "Truth has (now) arrived, and Falsehood perished: for Falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish" [17:81].

Along our journey, we have seen that Muhammad was a truly special human being. He had a lifelong reputation of honesty, even among his enemies. He tirelessly stood for truth and justice, and was steadfast in his divinely ordained mission to liberate mankind from falsehood. God empowered him with a remarkable insight into the unseen, to help us distinguish him from the many false prophets out there. We have also seen external evidences of Muhammad's Prophethood, which can be found in the ancient prophecies of other religious scriptures such as the

Bible. These act as signposts for his arrival, thousands of years before he was even born. We have analysed Muhammad's life, personality and teachings from many different angles, and they all point to the conclusion that he is a genuine Prophet. People from false religions and those who want to manipulate and mislead want to hide this truth, they don't want people to know it. Our job as human beings is to be totally committed to finding the truth and then submitting to it when it is made manifest to us. Will you be misled by those who sell the truth for a small price, or will you accept that there is nothing worthy of worship except God and that Muhammad is His Messenger?

Accepting that the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is indeed a messenger from God and following him would lead to tranquillity in this life and eternal bliss of Paradise in the next. Rejecting him after you have heard of him and understood his message would mean you are rejecting God. In consequence, you would be heading towards eternal hellfire: "Whoever does evil will be repaid with its like; whoever does good and believes, be it a man or a woman, will enter Paradise and be provided for without measure" [The Qur'an, 40:40].

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